

# AN INTRODUCTION TO

THE PHILOSOPHY OF

# HERBERT SPENCER

BY

WILLIAM HENRY HUDSON,

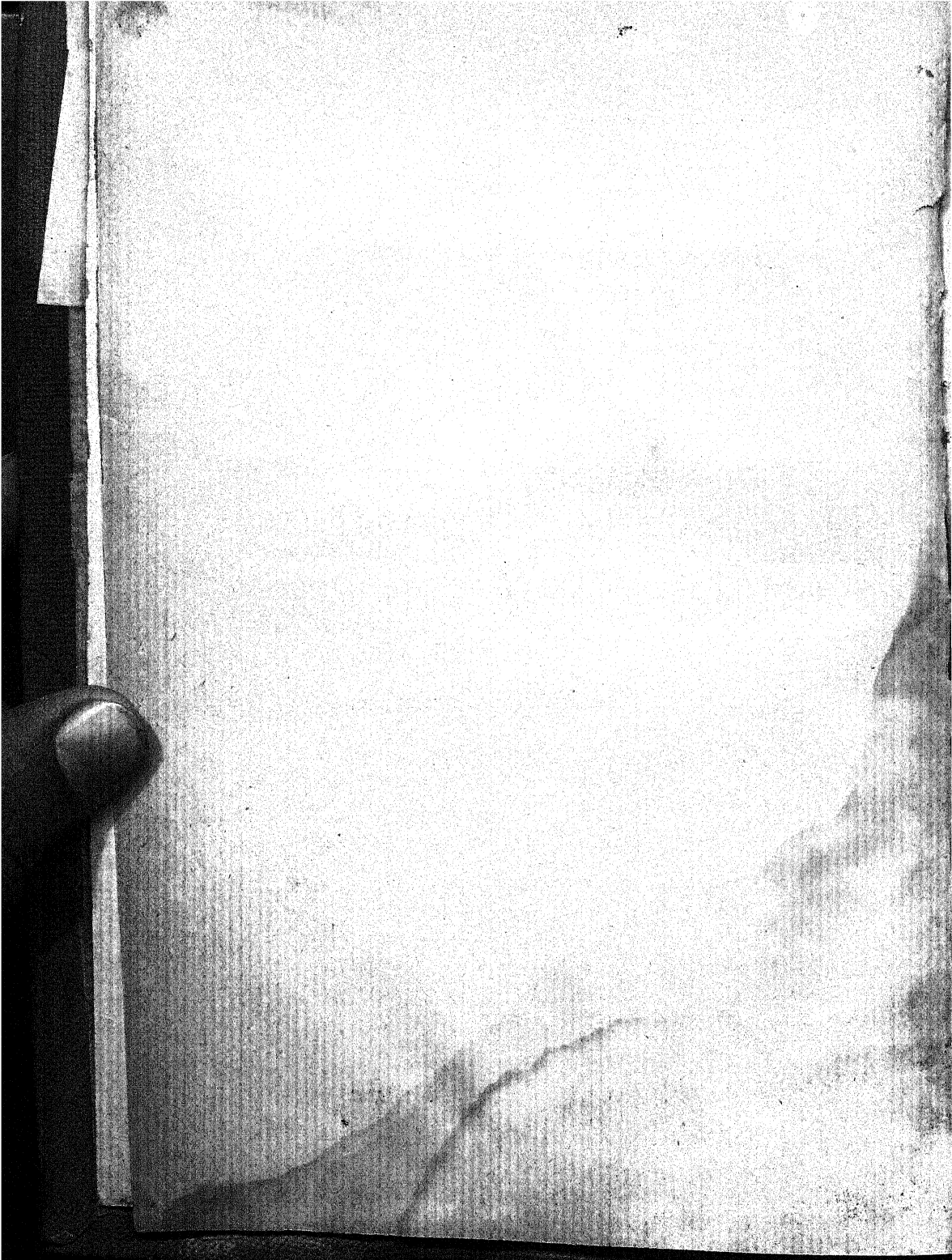
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Revised throughout, and in large part re-written

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## PREFACE

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IN the preface (dated Stanford University, California, April, 1894) to the first edition of this little book, I described it as "an outgrowth of lectures delivered from time to time on various aspects of the subject with which it deals," and explained that the writing of it had been undertaken "to meet what seems to me to be a very healthy popular demand." I went on to speak of the growth of public interest in the theory of Evolution in general, and in the writings of Herbert Spencer in particular, and of "the desire, often of late expressed to me by thoughtful and inquiring persons of broad outlook but limited leisure, to know more of Mr. Spencer and his work, of the relative and historic relations of his philosophy, and especially of its significance in connection with those questions with which we are all of us directly concerned—the questions of conduct, society, and religion."

I then described the purpose of my book in the paragraphs which I here reproduce:—

"But here arises a difficulty. Mr. Spencer's writings are and must be repel-

lent to many would-be readers account of their vast range and encyclopedic character. The comparatively unpractised and totally unguided student, set face to face with a whole shelf full of ponderous volumes, covering with great minuteness of detail an immense area of speculation and research, and couched in a singularly condensed and not very attractive style, is apt to pause before committing himself to a long and perilous journey over untried country—a journey probably fraught with unforeseen dangers, and for which he may well feel himself imperfectly prepared. Did he but possess some outline-map, however scanty, of the region to be traversed; did he but know something, to begin with, of the principal natural features likely to be encountered on the way, the whole undertaking would appear to him in a far more favourable light. He would then at least realise to some extent the direction he was to take, and feel the better equipped to grapple with whatever adventures might await him in his long and arduous course.

"In the hope of furnishing some such



outline-map or hand-guide the following pages are written. My object is, therefore, a very unambitious one. I do not propose to trace over the arguments or summarise the conclusions of the Spencerian philosophy. Still less do I feel called upon to enter into any discussion of its more debatable aspects. Nor, beyond all things, is it my intention to offer a substitute for the *Synthetic System* itself. Those who would really understand Mr. Spencer's ideas must themselves go to his writings; no short cut can be pointed out that can be other than unsatisfactory; no patent method can be devised that will relieve the student of the need for a first-hand study of Mr. Spencer's own arguments, or even render such first-hand study a very light and easy task. But experience on the platform and in private conversations has shown me that something may be done to smooth the way for the untrained and unwary feet. The sympathetic inquirer may be put into direct contact with the vital germ, or essential principle, of Mr. Spencer's thought; he may be led to realise how that thought took shape; he may be introduced to its genetic history; he may be placed in the position to understand its relation to modern tendencies in science and philosophy, and to appreciate the direction of its influence upon the practical problems of the every-day world. Guidance may thus be furnished of a helpful character,

and the approach to the *Synthetic Philosophy* made much less thorny and toilsome than it would otherwise be.

"If the present introduction succeeds to any extent in this humble labour of usefulness—if it serves to bring others under the more immediate influence of a teacher to whom my own personal debt is so great—its existence will be amply justified."

I have good reason to believe that, in the ten years which have passed since its publication, its existence *has* been justified in the ways suggested; and it is in the hope of still further widening its field of usefulness that I have gladly consented to the present cheap edition.

I am anxious to have it understood, however, that this is not by any means a mere reprint of the original work. I have revised it carefully throughout; I have endeavoured in several places, by additions and changes, to make my exposition fuller and completer than it was; and I have brought the whole book up to date. The greatest alterations have been made in the first half. The biographical chapter has been entirely re-written; and in this I have dealt with Spencer's life and personality more freely than I felt it proper to do while he was still alive. Chapters II. and III. have also been much changed; a good deal of fresh matter has been introduced; and several sections have been written quite anew. I hope, and believe, that in

this way I have made the book at once more interesting and more helpful.

At the same time, it must be distinctly borne in mind that I have in no wise changed its plan or enlarged its scope, as set forth in the paragraphs quoted from the original preface. I was a very thorough-going Spencerian when the volume was first written. That was, as I have said, ten years ago; and my attitude, in various respects, is far less discipular now. Yet I think, considering the purpose I had in view in writing it, it would be undesirable to confuse

my work by blending criticism with exposition. My aim is still, therefore, to set forth and illustrate Spencer's thought, not to pass judgment upon it, though in places (as notably in the closing chapter) I have not hesitated to travel beyond Spencer himself, and to point out what seem to me to be some of the natural implications of his teaching. As an Introduction, in the most modest sense of the word, the book was first published. As an Introduction, in that same most modest sense, it must still be regarded.

WILLIAM HENRY HUDSON.

*Hampstead, August, 1904.*





# An Introduction to the Philosophy of Herbert Spencer

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## CHAPTER I.

### HERBERT SPENCER: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

"It has seemed to me that a natural history of myself would be a useful accompaniment to the books which it has been the chief occupation of my life to write." In this opening sentence of the preface to his *Autobiography*, Herbert Spencer explained and justified the publication of the two massive volumes in which, with admirable frankness and extraordinary wealth of detail, he traced his career, analysed his character, and set forth the dominating purposes of his work. As I pointed out at the time of the appearance of this remarkable piece of self-portraiture,<sup>1</sup> Spencer was entirely right in emphasising its practical utility for the student of his philosophy, who will, indeed, find it beyond question the best possible introduction to the Synthetic System itself. Here we shall merely be adopting his own view of the intimacy and significance of the connection between the man and his work if, on the threshold of our examination of his writings, we pause to take a brief survey of his life. From the purely personal standpoint, it is true, such a record may very probably seem deficient in those more dramatic elements of interest for which we are accustomed to look in the history of any man who has left a profound impress upon the civilisation of his age. Spencer's biography is, in fact, essentially the biography of the thinker; it is little more than the story of his preparation for his great life-work, of the growth and consolidation of his ideas, of the inception of his philosophic system, and of the gradual progress of this, through difficulties all but insuperable, stage by stage, to its long-delayed completion. But, apart from the fact that it may serve to some extent to satisfy a natural curiosity concerning the life and character of a man whose writings have marked an epoch in the development of the world's thought, our sketch should prove of special value in one important respect. By relating the *Synthetic Philosophy* directly to the career and personality of its author, it should enable us to appreciate a feature of it which otherwise we should be very likely to overlook—the grandeur of that colossal achievement upon the moral side.

<sup>1</sup> *Independent Review*, July, 1904.

## I.

Born in Derby, on April 27th, 1820, and the only child of his parents to survive infancy, Herbert Spencer came of a stock long marked by intellectual integrity, fearlessness, and independence; what he himself calls his "ingrained non-conformity" of nature being, as ancestral records show, a well-defined and persistent family trait, which, clearly exhibited in several lines of progenitors, was extremely pronounced among the Spencers in the generation immediately preceding his own. His father, William George Spencer, was a man of strong individuality, great inventive powers, and an unconventionality of habit so decided that "he would never take off his hat to anyone, no matter of what rank," or "address anyone as *Esquire* or *Reverend*."<sup>1</sup> He was by profession a teacher, holding views, however, of the aims and methods of education greatly in advance of the average scholastic theories of his time. In opposition to the then common practice of burdening the childish memory with large numbers of unconnected facts, he maintained that the first business of education was rather to train the faculties of observation and reason in such manner that the unfolding mind should learn not only to acquire, but also to organise, knowledge for itself. Hence he regarded it as of more importance to foster originality and the free play of thought, to excite interest, and to strengthen the reflective powers, than to store the memories of his pupils with any quantity of merely bookish erudition. These points are particularly worthy of attention, since it was under the immediate influence of the elder Spencer that

the boy's mind began to develop. Unlike most men of genius, the Philosopher of Evolution appears to have owed little or nothing, either through inheritance or by training, to his mother; while in countless ways, in both intellect and character, he showed himself his father's son. There can, I think, be no question that his own early environment, and the power of his father's teaching and example, had not a little to do with the formulation of some of his own well-known views on education.

It has been frequently said that it was owing very largely to the child's precarious health that he was permitted to grow into boyhood without subjection to the mental coercion and cramming then so much in vogue. The truth of the matter is that he was not specially delicate in early years, and that his father's course of procedure was dictated wholly by fear of the physical and mental consequences which might result from application of the forcing system, to which he was totally opposed. So little pressure was, indeed, brought to bear upon him that, measured by the standard of mere acquisition, he was a very backward child. He was seven years old before he could read; and after that he does not seem to have exhibited much of that inherent fondness for books which is a common characteristic of the alert and thoughtful boy. It is not unamusing to find that the first volume which prompted him to read of his own accord was good, moral, prosy old *Sandford and Merton*—a work which, I suspect, has now quite outgrown its popularity, but which for a long time contrived, in some most unaccountable way, to hold the affections of large portions of the English-speaking youth; and that when, somewhat later, he began to seek gratification for his

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography*, i., 47.

awakening taste for fiction—by stealth, for his father did not approve of novels—*The Castle of Otranto* and the romances of Mrs. Radcliffe were among the books which he read secretly, after being sent to bed. But already, as always, his chief interest lay in the world of nature rather than in that of literature. To watch the growth of a plant or the habits of an insect gave him greater pleasure, even then, than could be yielded by any printed page. "Most children," he remarks, "are instinctively naturalists,"<sup>1</sup> though their enthusiasm too often wanes from lack of opportunity or encouragement. The elder Spencer, wiser than most parents in such matters, was careful to cultivate his son's early-shown love of natural history.

Though between the ages of seven and thirteen Herbert was sent pretty regularly to day-school (where, it is suggestive to learn, his insubordination of temper led to "chronic disobedience"), his real education was undoubtedly that which he received from his father at home. There, apart from direct instruction given—which, while in many respects exceedingly narrow, was, on the whole, of a kind calculated to feed and strengthen such a mind—the general conditions were distinctly favourable to mental and moral growth. Into the house came regularly, week by week and month by month, the more advanced of the medical, scientific, and literary periodicals, and into these the boy was permitted to delve at his will. More important than his varied and somewhat capricious reading, however, were the table conversations to which he early became an attentive listener, and in which he was presently allowed to bear his part. George Spencer

and his brothers—all men of powerful intellects and pronounced views, and all Radicals in politics and broad-minded in their theology—were accustomed, during their family gatherings, to discuss, with absolute freedom of thought and expression, all the paramount issues of the day, scientific and social, ethical and religious; and young Spencer was thus habituated from his earliest boyhood to the treatment as open questions of the grave matters which were then uppermost in the minds of thoughtful people. At a time when most children are being taught, beyond all things else, the value of authority and the sanctity of tradition, he was already inured to the freest and keenest atmosphere of discussion, and to the bold and direct criticism, in face of the settled opinions of the majority, of even the most time-honoured beliefs. This inevitably strengthened his natural self-reliance, still further quickened his critical powers, stimulated his tendency towards independent inquiry into things, and increased his hatred of having opinions imposed upon him ready-made and from the outside.

During this period his religious experiences were curious enough to call for passing remark. Both his father and his mother had been brought up Methodists; but while the latter remained an adherent of her old faith, the former, urged by a constantly growing dislike of much in the Methodist system and teaching, had forsaken that body to become a regular attendant at the Friends' Meeting House, drawn to the Society, not by any sympathy with its tenets, but by its individualism and complete freedom from ecclesiastical government. As he did not care to assume such control of the child's spiritual interests as would ignore the

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography*, i., 71.



mother's claim, a compromise was tacitly agreed to, and for some three years, Sunday after Sunday, Herbert went in the morning to the Meeting and in the evening to the Methodist Chapel. "I do not know that any marked effect on me followed," Spencer writes in comment, "further, perhaps, than that the alternation tended to enlarge my views by presenting me with differences of opinion and usage."<sup>1</sup> We may surmise, however, that the indirect tendency of such an experience would be towards the undermining of the authority of theological dogma in every form.

It would be interesting, did space permit, to pause here to consider the striking contrast presented by the early trainings of the two most acute and original thinkers in the domain of philosophy produced by England during the past century—the subject of this sketch and John Stuart Mill. Mill, it will be remembered, was also educated under his father's immediate supervision; was also surrounded in childhood by men of strong character and independent thought; and early learned to disregard tradition and to turn the lens of criticism upon the world's most cherished creeds. But here the analogy practically ends. Mill's mind was forced as in a hothouse; Spencer's was allowed to develop in the open air, and with the least possible pressure from without. Mill, precocious in all the learning of the schools, read Latin and Greek at an age when Spencer could scarcely spell out his own language. Mill was brought up to regard the whole vast system of popular theology as a mere congeries of idle and ridiculous fables; while Spencer grew up in personal relationship with Evan-

gelical Christianity in two of its most diverse forms. And, finally, Mill was taught to look upon all the problems of social and political science in a doctrinaire spirit, and as susceptible of rapid and entire resettlement; while Spencer was rather encouraged to regard every possible question on every possible subject as an open one, to be approached from many points of view, and investigated under many different lights. The contrast thus presented might be elaborated in detail, with results which, to those interested in pedagogy, could hardly fail to be instructive; but it would lead us too far out of our proper way to do more than touch upon it here. One special difference may, however, be accentuated. Mill's early training, unlike Spencer's, was almost exclusively in books. The regret which he expressed in his *Autobiography*, that he had never known the discipline of any practical scientific work, has certainly deep significance, coming from such a source.

## II.

At the age of thirteen, a complete change in the course of his education seeming desirable, Herbert was sent from home and placed under the charge of his uncle, the Rev. Thomas Spencer, at that time perpetual curate of Hinton Charterhouse, near Bath. Thomas, like the rest of the Spencer family, was a man of strongly-marked individuality, and, though an adherent of the Evangelical school, was so strange a specimen of his class that he was commonly regarded as hopelessly eccentric, if not indeed a trifle mad. A Radical at a period when nearly the whole Established Church was in bondage to the High Tory party, a teetotaler when the temperance

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography*, i., 83, 84.

movement was condemned by the religious world at large as a subtle form of Atheism; a Chartist, an avowed Free Trader, and (with a single exception) "the only clergyman out of fifteen thousand who contended that the people of England, mostly poor, should not be compelled to buy corn at artificially enhanced prices to enrich English landlords";<sup>1</sup> a vigorous and indefatigable lecturer and writer upon all matters touching the physical, moral, and social welfare of the people; he was certainly a man marked out with sufficient clearness from the rank and file of the ecclesiastics of his day. My own father, who knew him well in the forties, often in my hearing bore testimony to his great earnestness and devotion—qualities which, indeed, led him into such excesses of labour for the causes he had at heart that, never of robust constitution, he broke down ultimately from overwork, and died at the comparatively early age of fifty-seven.

At Hinton, Herbert now spent three quiet, but, from the point of view of intellectual and moral development, by no means uneventful, years; for the course of study pursued was more regular and systematic, and the discipline more rigorous, than had been the case at home. His successes and his failures in the subjects taken up continued to be alike significant. To get a lesson by heart was still almost intolerable, and he rarely recited anything correctly which had been learned by rote; but, on the other hand, he soon exhibited astonishing quickness and grasp in all matters demanding observation, thought, and reasoning power. In Greek, Latin, and French, to which a portion of his

time was daily given, very little progress was made; a chief cause of his dislike of languages being his "aversion to everything purely dogmatic."<sup>2</sup> But where the constructive and co-ordinating faculties were called into play—as in mathematics and mechanics—his advance was rapid and continuous. An incident which he himself has placed on record, and which occurred when he was between thirteen and fourteen, well illustrates the salient qualities of his mind and character—his penetration, fearless self-confidence, and disregard of all commonly-accepted authority, whether of book or teacher. While reading Arnett's *Physics* with his uncle, he boldly challenged the doctrine of inertia, as there expounded; and when his uncle came to Arnett's rescue, the objection was firmly adhered to in the teeth of an official opposition which would have reduced most boys to silence. With a mind so clear, alert, and independent, it is not surprising that he should have taken a keen delight in breaking away from the travelled roads to strike out new mathematical problems for himself, and elaborate original solutions for old ones.

The design for a time entertained by Thomas Spencer, himself an academic honours man, and to a certain extent an advocate of classical culture, of sending Herbert to Cambridge was gradually relinquished, as the uncle came to realise the lad's unfitness for a university career; and Spencer thus adds another to the long list of English leaders of thought who owe nothing directly to either of our ancient institutions of learning. That by foregoing a university

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography*, i., 30.

<sup>2</sup> *Autobiography*, i., 108, 109.

curriculum he sacrificed something, more especially perhaps upon the social side, will be generally conceded; but it may, I think, fairly be urged that what he lost was, on the whole, trifling and unimportant in comparison with what he gained. The Cambridge of sixty years ago was an antique, aristocratic, exclusive, and highly conservative seat of humanistic learning; saturated by the intellectual traditions of the renaissance; dominated by ancient methods and ideals; and wholly out of touch with the conditions and requirements of the modern world. A few years spent in such a place in enforced attention to certain prescribed studies which, as then and there pursued, would have been totally deficient in seminal power, and to which, for his part, he would have brought no fertilising enthusiasm, could have contributed nothing to the growth of his mind or character; and while the influence of an environment steeped in the dogmatism of obsolete schools of thought could hardly have turned him aside permanently from his natural course of development, it would almost certainly have made more difficult his line of approach to the great work to which his life was to be devoted. That Spencer suffered, and in some directions very seriously, from want of what is specifically called "culture," I should be one of the first to admit; and Mr. Macpherson is doubtless right in suggesting that, in a practical way, his road would have been smoothed for him by academic standing and connections, since he would not then have been obliged to live down "the insidious opposition of university cliques, who could not bear to see a new thinker of commanding power step forward into the intellectual arena without the hall-

mark of university culture."<sup>1</sup> Yet, considering all the conditions, and realising how disastrous it would have been had he, on entering manhood, been hampered, to how slight an extent soever, by hereditary leading-strings, theological or pedantic, we can hardly be too thankful that Spencer remained a free lance. This much must at least be added. Not only did Spencer himself never see any reason to regret the course pursued, but even his uncle, the strongest advocate of the benefits of a Cambridge training, lived to acknowledge that that course was probably the wise one.<sup>2</sup>

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Be this as it may, however, to Cambridge he did not go, but on leaving Hinton returned instead to his father's house, where he spent what was to all appearances an idle and profitless year. Yet, while little in the way of regular study was accomplished, the mind was by no means lying fallow, for the old pastime of independent research in the field of mathematics and mechanics was resumed; one result of which was the striking out of a curious original theorem in descriptive geometry, afterwards published, along with his own demonstration,

<sup>1</sup> *Herbert Spencer: The Man and his Work*, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Spencer's pronounced opposition to the ordinary classical curriculum is one of the most widely-known characteristics of his general teaching. Systematically expressed in his *Education*, it will be found cropping up in unexpected forms and places in almost all his other writings. It should be noted that it is largely based upon his belief that the common scholastic routine, with its superstitious veneration of the past, and entire devotion to merely bookish learning, inevitably leads to intellectual subjection; and that it is, therefore, one aspect of his general revolt against the tyranny of authority.



in the *Civil Engineer and Architect's Journal*. Then came his first experiment in practical work, as assistant in a school in which he had spent some little time as a boy. Mr. Spencer senior had a very high idea of the duties, responsibilities, and inherent dignity of his calling; at a time when there was still point in the popular saying that a man who had failed in everything else could buy a birch and turn schoolmaster, he realised to the full the teacher's vast importance in moulding the destinies of the coming generation; and, in face of a public opinion which persisted in treating the educator as belonging as naturally to the lower grades as the warrior to the upper grades of society, he felt strongly (as Carlyle afterwards phrased it) that there is a deeper and truer glory in training men's minds than in blowing their bodies to pieces with gunpowder. Holding these views, he would naturally have been well satisfied to see his son adopt his own profession; and the measure of success which attended this early and brief trial was sufficient to prove that Herbert possessed the required qualifications. With a rare faculty for luminous exposition, he combined the power—the importance of which every practical teacher will recognise—of stimulating interest in the subjects dealt with; while his moral qualities showed to no less advantage. As a boy it had been remarked of him that, though he strongly resented any act of tyranny on the part of a master, and rose impatiently against anything in the shape of bullying from his older school-mates, he was always a favourite with the younger children, because his behaviour towards them was marked by the same respect as he himself demanded from those above him. In his new position he was quick to

recognise and careful to make the fullest allowance for the individualities of his pupils; and thus went far to realise that fine ideal of the relations between teacher and taught which he afterwards so strenuously insisted upon in the book on education.

But, all this notwithstanding, the experiment came to nothing—not apparently from any particular objection on young Spencer's part to the career of a teacher, but simply because his attention was unexpectedly taken off in another direction. In the autumn of 1837 an offer came from the resident engineer of the London division of the London and Birmingham Railway then in process of construction, which was at once accepted; the bias of his interests and the line of his studies alike pointing to the profession of civil engineering as one in which he would have good chances of success. He now passed nearly a year in the ordinary routine of engineering work—partly in carrying on surveys, partly in making drawings; and at the end of that time transferred himself to the Birmingham and Gloucester Railway, where a further period of eighteen months was spent in a fairly satisfactory way. During the latter engagement his progress in practical engineering was indicated by various papers on technical subjects in the *Civil Engineer and Architect's Journal*; while the invention of a little instrument, which he called the velocimeter, for calculating the speed of locomotive engines, bore testimony to the continued activity of his mind, more especially, as usual, in the direction of original work.

It now seemed, indeed, as if his course in life had at length been marked out for him. From that time onward, for the space of some ten years, he continued

to be intermittently engaged in engineering pursuits—periods of considerable activity alternating, however, with lengthy intervals, during which professional work remained at an almost entire standstill. But by-and-bye, after several premonitory recessions in the tide of commercial prosperity, the railway mania ebbed away, leaving Spencer, along with countless other young men, stranded high and dry upon the shore. The crisis was a serious one; for those—and their name was legion—who had been attracted to the work during the season of temporary excitement now found themselves committed to a profession which offered but little outlook as a career, and was seriously overstocked. Thus, at the age of twenty-eight, Spencer found himself but little advanced towards a practical settlement in life, for, from any merely worldly point of view, the labours of the past few years had been almost thrown away. In no very hopeful frame of mind, therefore, as may well be imagined, he had now once more to beat a retreat to his family home in Derby, there to cast about him with a view to deciding upon his next step.

Regarded in the light of the man's later work, however, these years had not been altogether fruitless. In his not infrequent intervals of leisure, he had done a good deal of miscellaneous reading, and not a little thinking, and the result was that the expansion of his mind, which was presently to be so rapid, had already well begun. Science of all kinds continued to occupy the largest share of his attention; one book, in particular, deserving to be singled out for the marked, though indirect, influence which it exerted upon his thought. This was Sir Charles Lyell's then recently published *Principles of*

*Geology*. It was in this volume, which he read with deep interest at the age of twenty, that—though the idea was not altogether new to him—he first found a clear statement of that general doctrine of the “progressive development of organic structure,”\* which in those pre-Darwinian days went somewhat vaguely by the name of the “Development Hypothesis.” It is a matter of common knowledge that, with a courage and candour rare even among scientific men, Lyell in after years yielded to the arguments of the evolutionists, and, as he himself phrased it, “read his recantation.” But in the original form of the work, then in Spencer's hands, the writer made common cause with the uniformitarians against the theory of “innate progressive development” expounded by Lamarck and his disciples; and thus it happened that Spencer's first real acquaintance with the conception of Evolution was made in a volume in which it was examined in detail, and thrown aside as valueless. Spencer, none the less, was more struck by the doctrine than by the arguments directed against it, and—by no means the first convert who has been made by the attacks of the enemy—accepted the Lamarckian view so far as to believe in the evolution of species, while rejecting all the great Frenchman's accompanying theories save that of the adaptation of organisms to their environment by the transmission of acquired characters. From that time on he has to be reckoned an ardent supporter of the general idea of organic development. There can be no doubt that the ready acceptance on his part of a theory which was then held to be so radical and

\* Prof. Sedgwick's *Anniversary Address to the Geological Society*; 1831.

startling, and which, as we now see clearly enough, rested in those days upon foundations altogether too uncertain to satisfy the rigidly scientific inquirer, was mainly due to the singularly well-prepared condition of his own mind. His own statement, indeed, puts the matter beyond question—the theory, he says, was in harmony “with that general idea of the order of nature towards which I had, throughout life, been growing. Supernaturalism, in whatever form, had never commended itself. From boyhood there was in me a need to see, in a more or less distinct way, how phenomena, no matter of what kind, are to be naturally explained. Hence, when my attention was drawn to the question whether organic forms have been specially created, or whether they have arisen by progressive modifications, physically caused and inherited, I adopted the last supposition, inadequate as was the evidence, and great as were the difficulties in the way. Its congruity with the course of procedure throughout things at large gave it an irresistible attraction; and my belief in it never afterwards wavered, much as I was in after years ridiculed for entertaining it. The incident,” Spencer adds, with his characteristic fondness for interpreting individual case in the light of comprehensive principle, “illustrates the general truth that the acceptance of this or that particular belief is in part a question of the type of mind.”

By reference to the same consideration we may doubtless explain the further fact that, with the maturing and consolidation of his thought about this time, there went the gradual dropping of the current creed. The whole case on this head has probably been summed up when we say that the miraculous element upon which that creed then laid the

principal stress was fatally out of keeping with the entire character of his mind. There are many men (and, owing to what Mr. Lecky called the “declining sense of the miraculous,” their number is daily growing greater) to whom the so-called supernatural basis of all popular theologies is just as immediately repugnant as it was immediately attractive to even the most acute and thoughtful minds during the ages of faith. Where they naturally and instinctively sought a metaphysical interpretation for all phenomena, we just as naturally and instinctively recoil from such an interpretation. By the operation, generation after generation, of a thousand subtle influences the whole atmosphere of life has been altered; the measures of judgment and the standards of probability have alike been changed; and the result is that the supernaturalism which held sway in the past is rapidly dying, not under stress of argument, but simply from inanition; not because it has been disproved, but because the thoughts of men have passed on whither it cannot follow. Without, therefore, attempting to settle the whole question of miracles on purely *à priori* grounds—than which no course could well be more unsatisfactory—many a man born and nurtured in the secular and sceptical environment of the present day necessarily finds that question resolve itself into one of relative antecedent probability, as between two possible explanations—a temporary aberration from that which verified experience has revealed to us as the undeviating course of nature; and an error in human testimony or interpretation; and since, first, we do not personally know anything of that disturbance in the normal order of things which is called miracle, and, secondly, the constant tendency of all

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historic and scientific interpretation is to bring every such supposed disturbance into the category of law; while, on the other hand, every passing day yields abundant examples of the untrustworthy character of even the best-intentioned and most carefully-styled evidence; it is clear that the balance of probability must in every case be as infinity to one against the alleged miracle.

I am not, let me insist, undertaking to support the popular thesis that a miracle—by which we may mean with Locke an occurrence “contrary to the established course of nature,” or, more correctly, one not to be accounted for by our limited knowledge of that course—could not conceivably happen, and therefore never has happened. As Professor Huxley once pointed out, such a proposition, however attractive it might have looked in the days of Hume, would not now commend itself to any mind trained in scientific methods of investigation. What I do maintain is that, in any circumstances, the occurrence of a miracle, and still more, therefore, of a long series of miracles, must be held as antecedently so improbable that the fullest, clearest, and most unmistakeably detailed evidence must be required in its favour to counterbalance the enormous presumption against it furnished by the generalised experiences of mankind. The question, therefore, assumes the form as to whether, from the very nature of the case, such evidence is or can be forthcoming in regard to any miracle alleged to have been performed under such conditions as those existing, for instance, in the early days of Christianity. Here the principle of relative probability must be allowed its fullest weight; and the greater the antecedent improbability, the stronger must be the argument

advanced to overthrow it. A body of evidence which might suffice to convince us that a sick man made a most astonishing recovery from an illness need not, therefore, be held to justify a belief that a dead man was raised from the grave.

But to return to the attitude which Spencer, about this time it would seem, took up towards the orthodox creed. That attitude was simply the result of a gradual development of thought, the religious ideas in which he had been bred slowly and almost insensibly losing their hold upon him. He never passed the current theology under systematic examination; never undertook any regular inquiry into the evidence for and against it; never formally rejected it. To his nature, emotional and intellectual, it had been alien from the very first.<sup>1</sup> It had never become absorbed into his thought, because there was nothing in his mental constitution with which it could cohere, no place in which it would fit without upsetting and destroying the whole system of his belief. Thus, with the consolidation of such belief, it was merely dropped.

But Spencer, during this period of practical failure and rapid mental expansion, had done more than by study and thought to lay up a store of material for future use. He had delivered himself of his first message to the world. At twenty we find him writing, with all a youth's engaging self-confidence, of his desire “to make public some of my ideas upon the state of the world and religion, together with a few remarks on education.” Two years later—in the summer of 1842—he began the publication, in a paper called the *Nonconformist*,

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography*, i., 151.

of a series of letters on "The Proper Sphere of Government." These were subsequently revised, and made their appearance in pamphlet form in the course of the following year. Merely noting that, in this first discussion of a question on which he was to have so much to say by-and-bye, Spencer already insists on "the limitation of State action to the maintenance of equitable relations among citizens," we will postpone to another chapter any discussion of the relations of this little work to the order of the writer's thought. Here our concern is only with its place in his life; and in this respect it has its importance. Teaching had been abandoned for civil engineering, and this in its turn had abandoned him; and the outlook, in consequence, seemed gloomy enough. But one thing his little adventure into the world of literature had done for him—it had suggested the possibility, now that other careers had failed and the question of what to do next had become an urgent one, of turning his pen to account. Some five years after the publication of the "Letters," he paid a visit to London, partly on business connected with financial losses sustained by his uncle Thomas, but chiefly with the view of looking about for something to do; and out of this ultimately came the opportunity of a fresh start in life. At the end of 1848 he was appointed sub-editor of the *Economist*, and immediately established himself in the metropolis. The position, which he held till 1853, was by no means an ideal one for him; but it possessed two considerable advantages. It yielded a regular income, which, though small, was sufficient to meet his modest bachelor needs; and it allowed him a rather unusual margin of leisure for private study and work.

## IV.

It was during such leisure hours, in the course of the next two years, that Spencer wrote his first important work, *Social Statics: The Conditions Essential to Human Happiness Specified, and the First of them Developed*. Published in 1850, when he was just thirty, this volume contained an extremely fresh and original treatment of social problems upon the fundamental principle that "Every man is free to do whatsoever he wills, provided he does not infringe the equal freedom of any other man"; was startling enough in many of the inferences drawn from this principle; and, as will be gleaned, pronouncedly individualistic in its whole tone and tendency; but, as is sufficiently well known, Spencer afterwards grew dissatisfied both with its metaphysical implications, and with some of its conclusions, and at one time made an effort to withdraw it from circulation. At the period of publication, however, it aroused some little interest, and, while of course never appealing to a very wide circle of readers, was on the whole well received by the critics—more favourably, indeed, than any of his later books; a fact which he notes as illustrative of the worthlessness of ordinary criticism.<sup>2</sup> That which it did for him personally was to bring him rather prominently into public notice, and to introduce him, as a rising author, to the literary and scientific world of the time. It was then that he formed his intimate friendship with the Brays and the Hennells, of Coventry; with the versatile George Henry Lewes, currently known as the ugliest man and the best talker in London; and with that wonderful

<sup>2</sup> *Autobiography*, i., 365.

woman who was then sub-editing the *Westminster Review*, and had obtained a certain standing as "the translatress of Strauss," but who was a few years later to take England by storm with the *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede*. When, in September, 1851, George Eliot wrote to Mr. Bray that she had recently met "a Mr. Herbert Spencer, who has just brought out a large work on *Social Statics*, which Lewes pronounces the best he has ever seen on the subject," she described the beginning of an association, full of mutual reverence and esteem, which was to last till death ended it by the removal of the great novelist herself. More than this, however: *Social Statics* gave Spencer himself a practical and unmistakable revelation of his own powers, and pointed out to him more clearly than anything had done before the lines which his subsequent reading and thinking might most profitably pursue. It is surprising, therefore, to learn that, notwithstanding the success he had won, his misgivings concerning the future continued to be so great that he still more or less seriously entertained the idea of emigrating to New Zealand. His method of dealing with this project was highly characteristic. "Averse to unmethodic ways of judging," he drew up "a rough numerical valuation of the several ends in life which might be respectively better achieved, these by staying at home, and those by emigrating"; and then, "adding up the numbers on each side," arrived at totals which he regarded as yielding "more trustworthy ideas of the relative advantages than mere unaided contemplation." The result came out in a way to set all doubts at rest—advantages on the side of England, 110; on the side of New

Zealand, 301!<sup>\*</sup> We all know what happens when we undertake to decide upon a course of action by tossing a penny; and Spencer, fortunately for the world, disregarded his unimpeachable calculation and stayed at home.

The most practical result of *Social Statics* was the connection which through it he now formed with the *Westminster Review*, a magazine of many years' standing, then recently purchased and established on a new basis for the promulgation of advanced views of social, scientific, and religious questions, by an enterprising publisher named John Chapman. It was in the pages of this review that he began the publication of those elaborate essays which, though now mainly interesting as auxiliary to his great work, and as marking out the lines of his approach to and preparation for it, were enough at the time to call attention to the rise of a new force in the philosophic world. Here, as we have to deal with these essays from the outside only—as events in the man's life—it will be sufficient if we say of them that their success enabled him after a while to drift out of the semi-journalistic and routine work in which he had been engaged on the *Economist*, and to devote his whole time and energy to what was now beginning slowly to assume the character of a chosen undertaking.

For some seven years after this, with an interval of eighteen months of enforced idleness—of which more anon—he continued to be pretty regularly engaged with magazine work of this kind, and, in addition, produced, in 1855, a bulky volume on psychology, afterwards incorporated into his more extended treatise on the same subject in the *Synthetic*

<sup>\*</sup> *Autobiography*, i., 370.



System. In this work the problems of mind were throughout approached and discussed from the evolutionary point of view, which was, indeed, the point of view from which, as the essays show us, every question, of whatever class, was now regarded. All this kept him busy till 1860. But in the meantime a change, destined to be fraught with results of a permanently disastrous character, had come into his life. Overwork upon the *Psychology* had brought on a nervous breakdown so serious that, for fully a year and a half, he was forced to lay aside the pen and suspend his labours altogether. Partial restoration followed this prolonged rest; but it was partial restoration only. From that time onward to the end he was a martyr to dyspepsia and insomnia, and to the hypochondria which was the distressing, though quite natural, result of a shattered nervous system.

The year 1860, to the verge of which we have now followed him, marks the great crisis in Spencer's life; and, beyond this, is for ever memorable in the history of modern thought, for it was this year which witnessed the publication of the prospectus of his philosophic system. In the light of this new and enormous enterprise, on the threshold of which he now stood, all his previous output, remarkable as in itself that had been, dwindles to the proportions of mere experiment and preparation. The time had now come for achievement. A full outline-plan of the proposed work was given to the public, and Spencer laid his hand to a task which he knew would mean the production of ten stout volumes, close-packed with thought, and of no very saleable character, and which he calculated would occupy twenty years of regular and unremitting toil.

Let us turn for a moment to his circumstances and general outlook at the time, that we may be in a position the more fully to appreciate all that was implied by self-committal to such an undertaking. Marvellous in itself, that undertaking grows still more marvellous when we come to realise the conditions of its inception and execution. In the first place, Spencer's financial prospects were not in any way satisfactory. Possessed at the outset of but small personal resources, he had frittered away the greater part of these in devotion to studies which had brought him but little practical recompense. He had, indeed, derived something of an income from his pen; but his articles had demanded too much thought and labour to make their production remunerative. A small sum of money which had been left him by his uncle, the clergyman, now dead, had been wholly or largely swallowed up by the publication of two volumes which had so little to commend them in the popular market that their value as an investment had been worse than nothing at all; while a further drain of no inconsiderable kind had been made upon his purse by eighteen months of idleness, and all the added expenses consequent upon deranged health. Beyond, and worse than all this, there was the fact that his breakdown had left him in so impaired a condition that three hours a day was all that he could safely rely upon for the carrying forward of his work. Finally, as a commercial enterprise, the proposed undertaking offered nothing of an encouraging character. Few enough could, in the very nature of things, be induced to lend it their support, for the public to which appeal was to be made was necessarily very limited; while, among those who looked on with

partial interest or half-aroused sympathy, there were many who deprecated the self-imposed task as too vast, comprehensive, and ambitious for adequate accomplishment within the limits of a single life, and as even foolhardy in the uncertain state of his health. Such obstacles might well have proved enough to deter the most courageous and indomitable of men, and one cannot be astonished that, when at length the concluding division of his vast scheme was reached, Spencer himself, looking back over his six-and-thirty years of toil, should have been surprised at his "audacity in undertaking it, and still more surprised by its completion."<sup>2</sup> Whatever may be said about the *Synthetic Philosophy* as a coherent body of doctrine, however much we may individually disagree with its central principles and their application in his hands to the solution of the fundamental problems of life, there is thus a personal grandeur about the gigantic work upon which it is a pleasure and an inspiration to dwell. As a monument of quiet courage and perseverance, of self-sacrifice and entire consecration to the pursuit of a great ideal, it stands almost without rival in the history of the world's grandest achievements. Spencer's place is for all time among those heroes of moral effort, struggle, and conquest whose memory more and more, it is to be hoped, men will delight to honour.

#### V.

From this time on the history of the man is, for the outside world, practically merged in the history of his work; the dates of importance are those of the publication of the various instalments of

the projected series; all else in his life assumes something of an episodic character. He had estimated, as I have said, that, allowing two years for each volume, the completion of his system would take twenty years. Reckoning from the issue of the first part of *First Principles*, in October, 1860, to that of the last division of the *Sociology* in the autumn of 1896, it actually occupied just thirty-six years. Difficulties of many kinds he had anticipated at the outset; but the event proved that he had not made sufficient allowance for them. For a time the practical support yielded to him by the reading public was so small that he came within measurable distance of abandoning his labours altogether;<sup>3</sup> a course he would almost certainly have taken had not the sudden death of his father added something unexpectedly to his means. After this interruptions occurred with increasing frequency in various unlooked-for ways. He was forced to pause in the methodical unfolding of his plan to explain, re-state, clear up misconceptions, and unfortunately

<sup>2</sup> It is a pleasure to recall the service rendered and the sympathy shown at this period of discouragement by friends and well-wishers. On the other side of the Atlantic, Professor Youmans, one of his most devoted adherents, succeeded in raising among Spencer's admirers a sum of \$7,000, which was invested in his name in American securities; and brought to England, together with the certificates of the shares, a gold watch, which he presented to him as a tribute of their gratitude and admiration. The money Spencer accepted as a public trust to be applied to the purposes of the *Descriptive Sociology*; the watch he valued to the end as one of his most cherished possessions. At home, John Stuart Mill, with rare public spirit and generosity, offered to assume the financial responsibility of the undertaking by guaranteeing the publishers against loss—a proposal which Spencer could not indeed entertain, but which touched him deeply (*Autobiography*, ii., 133-136).

<sup>3</sup> Preface to *The Principles of Sociology*, vol. iii.

(for in this always distracting and generally unprofitable way he consumed much valuable time) to reply to adverse criticisms. His energies were drawn off into other, though in most cases directly subsidiary, lines of work. The supervision of the compilation of the *Descriptive Sociology*, itself an immense task; the writing for the "International Scientific Series" of his book on *The Study of Sociology*; the publication of a number of timely essays (such as those composing *The Man versus the State*), rendered necessary, as he felt very strongly, by the political conditions and tendencies of the hour; all these things—valuable as in themselves they were—delayed the prosecution of the larger design. And, worse than all, his physical powers, as years went on, continued steadily to decline. His calculation of a working-day of three hours, moderate as to most men this would have seemed, presently turned out to be altogether extravagant. Only by the most careful husbanding of his energies was sustained labour possible to him at all. During the later years of his work absolute inaction was often forced upon him as the sole means of recuperating his over-taxed strength; while through many a prolonged period of sleeplessness and utter prostration the dictation of a paragraph or two each morning represented the extreme reach of his productive capacity. That in such circumstances the *Synthetic Philosophy*—with its grand total of 6,000 closely-printed pages—should ever have been pushed to completion must be regarded as a fact not easily paralleled in the history of philosophy or letters.

During these years his outer life was quiet and uneventful. Never married, and, after the death of his mother in 1867, without near relatives, he lived till

1886 in boarding-houses in London, thus, under medical advice, escaping the evils of a solitary domestic existence. His home for nearly a quarter of a century was at 37 and 38, Queen's Gardens, Lancaster Gate, where I myself first knew him; though at the same time he had, at 2, Leinster Place, near by, an independent room, which he used as a library and study. It was there that, during the first year of my secretarial association with him, most of his work was done; his habit being to walk over about half-past nine, dictate as long as he felt able—in order to economise his strength, he had made it a practice to dictate everything, even his letters—and then leave for the day. At that period he spent several hours of the afternoon and evening pretty regularly at the Athenæum Club, returning to Queen's Gardens, however, in time to listen to some music, of which he was always extremely fond, and in which he found his principal solace as increasing ill-health made other distractions impossible. Into general society he never went much, and less and less as years passed on; his abstention being prompted, not by any natural fondness for seclusion, but by the nervous evils—often real, sometimes imaginary—which social excitement entailed, and the consequent interruption of his work. Of external events, during this long period, the most important was his visit to the United States in 1882.\*

In the summer of 1886 he went for a long visit to Brighton (always a favourite place of resort with him), and, after various experiments (including a home of his own in London), finally took a house there on the East Cliff, facing the

\* See *The Americans* (Essays, vol. iii.).



sea, "with the intention," as he wrote me at the time, "of living here for the rest of my life." This intention was fulfilled. Little by little he lapsed into complete invalidism, and, with the completion of the work for which he had practically lived, ceased to have much desire for the continuance of an existence the great purpose of which was accomplished, and which now was year by year becoming an increasing burden. Yet the end, to which he had long calmly looked forward, came very slowly; for, despite his half a century of nervous trouble, his constitution was still marked by wonderful resisting power. When it did come it was very peaceful. During the afternoon of December 7th, 1903, he fell gradually into unconsciousness, and so passed quietly away in the early morning of the following day.

In accordance with his directions, his remains were cremated at Golder's Hill Crematorium, where Mr. Leonard Courtney delivered a brief but impressive address. As my friend, Mr. Hector Macpherson, and I walked away together afterwards, with the last words of the orator's tender farewell lingering in our ears, that sense of the utter indifference of cosmic things to our human losses and sorrows, which seldom fails to affect one at such a time, came upon us with singular force. The sun was shining brightly over the placid winter landscape; the air was crisp and clear.

"Nothing in Nature's aspect intimated  
That a great man was dead!"

The last time I saw Spencer was in his bedroom at Brighton, and amid the details of our conversation, every one of which is naturally fresh in my memory, there is one that I specially recall. Just back from America, I told him of the deep interest I found everywhere taken

there in his work, and spoke of the immense range of his influence upon the world's thought.<sup>1</sup> His reply was: "I am satisfied; I am satisfied!" Yet his satisfaction was offset by disappointment. The completion of his *Philosophy* had been so long delayed that it brought him but little of the exhilaration that might have been anticipated; his chief pleasure was in the simple sense of emancipation from long-continued toil.<sup>2</sup> And worse than weariness and this apathy of disillusion was the realisation of the fact that precisely that part of his gospel upon which he himself set the greatest value had apparently been preached in vain. His practical teachings on one important matter were commonly unheeded, even where they were not openly flouted; the socialism which he had made it one of his chief purposes to resist was, in spite of all his efforts, yearly gaining ground; signs of reaction were everywhere manifest in religion, politics, and society; militarism and imperialism were rampant; and the great nations of the world, dominated by

<sup>1</sup> No other philosophic works have, I suppose, been translated into so many languages as his. Versions of at any rate a great part of the *Synthetic Philosophy* exist in French, German, Italian, and Russian. But of all his writings, the book on education has apparently been most widely influential. It has appeared in—among other tongues—modern Greek, Sanskrit, and Arabic; and education in Mexico and the South American States has been greatly moulded by it. In 1901 Spencer wrote me that he had learned some time before this from the Chinese Ambassador that two translations of his writings were in progress in China—one into the Northern and the other into the Southern dialect. I once saw it stated, on the authority of a missionary, that the influence of the Spencerian philosophy was the chief obstacle to the spread of evangelical Christianity among the cultured classes of Japan.

<sup>2</sup> Preface to *Principles of Sociology*, vol. iii.

a sordid and materialistic spirit, were moving further and further away from what he had always proclaimed to be the true principles of sanity and righteousness. All these things filled him with sorrow and alarm. In earlier life he would doubtless have found encouragement in the thought that, deplorable as such reactionary tendencies are, they will not permanently interrupt the world's true progress. But it is hard for a man of eighty to derive much comfort from reading "what the centuries say against the hours."

## VI.

Spencer's was a simple and transparent nature, and the salient features of his character may be easily marked out.

A man of absolute independence of thought and judgment, and defiant of authority and tradition in every form, he was a born nonconformist in the extremest sense of the word. A maker of many books, yet in no sense a bookman; with a range of knowledge often described as encyclopædic, yet always impatient as a reader even on subjects directly connected with his own lines of work; he cared little—too little, as he afterwards came to acknowledge—for what others had thought and done; and, heedless of great names and established doctrines, pushed his own way resolutely along the paths of investigation in which he is now recognised to have been a pioneer. This trait was associated on the moral side with splendid fearlessness and courage. Throughout life he spoke out what he thought without calculation of consequences. He never once paused to consider the expediency of

any view; he readily espoused the most unpopular causes; was wholly indifferent to the obloquy called forth by his heretical opinions of men and things; held tenaciously to what he believed to be true and right; and did not flinch even if, as a result, he found himself in a minority of one.

His fertility of mind was as astonishing as his independence. This is shown by almost every page of his *Synthetic Philosophy*, but remains equally clear if we leave that work entirely out of consideration. For, in all sorts of matters lying wholly outside the range of his more special interests, his originality and inventiveness were constantly revealed. We have seen how, as a boy, he made his own solutions of problems in geometry. In early life he devised all kinds of contrivances for all kinds of purposes—for rationalising writing, for example, for a philosophic language; for a new nomenclature of colours, based on the plan of the mariner's compass; and the list of his inventions—which includes a scheme for aerial locomotion, a binding pin for loose music, a fishing-rod joint, an invalid bed, a new escapement for watches, and improvements in planing machinery, in dressing artificial flies, and in the printing press—is too long to be reproduced in detail. These are simply illustrations of a "constructive imagination" of enormous power, which worked with almost equal ease in many directions. Of that "constructive imagination" the *Synthetic Philosophy* is merely the greatest product.

In personal life Spencer impressed most people who met him but casually as rather cold, remote, and difficult of access; and it was only as one came to know him well that one succeeded in

\* *Autobiography*, ii., 441, 442.

breaking through his reserve, and came to see and appreciate the more sympathetic aspects of his character. He was never, indeed, very easy to get on with. What he himself calls his "abnormal tendency to criticism" was too much in the ascendant; sleeplessness and nervous dyspepsia, with the hypochondria which these engendered, made him occasionally irritable and sharp of tongue; and, having little tolerance for the prejudices and conventions of everyday life, he often seemed harsh in his judgments, and sometimes even needlessly censorious. Moreover, his emotional nature was kept under undue restraint by an intellect which sat in perpetual judgment upon it; the free play of feeling was repressed; and a certain consequent dryness and want of flexibility made one regret that among the sacrifices forced upon him by his life-work was that of those normal human relationships and responsibilities which would have done much to expand his feelings and give warmth and colour to the daily routine. But these limitations must never be allowed to blind us to his splendid positive qualities. His uprightness, purity, and scrupulous honesty, even in the pettiest

details, his conscientiousness, integrity, and single-hearted devotion to truth, filled all who knew him with admiration; and it is hardly too much to say that his moral greatness did not fall short of his intellectual greatness. Justice, as I have often said elsewhere, and as Spencer himself declares in the *Autobiography*, was the predominant sentiment with him, as it is the predominant note of his ethical system; and if in his strict adherence to this supreme principle he might sometimes have seemed exacting in the demands which he made upon others, it has always to be remembered that, unlike many professed teachers, he did not lower his standards when he came to apply them to himself. In our study of the writings of any great master it is always a satisfaction to feel assured that he strove, consistently and courageously, to live by his own creed. This was emphatically the case with Herbert Spencer.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed account of Spencer's personality and character I may refer the reader to two articles of my own—"Herbert Spencer: A Character Study" (*Fortnightly Review*, January, 1904), and "Herbert Spencer's *Autobiography*" (*Independent Review*, July, 1904).



## CHAPTER II.

SPENCER'S EARLIER WORK—PREPARATION FOR  
THE SYNTHETIC PHILOSOPHY—SPENCER AND  
THE DOCTRINE OF EVOLUTION

THERE is no safer or more satisfactory approach to the study of any system of philosophy than by way of its evolution. If we want to put ourselves into a position to understand the attitude taken up by any great thinker towards the world and its problems—if we want to catch the personal note in his utterances, and to appreciate the relation of his own ideas to the intellectual movements of his time—we cannot do better than to make ourselves acquainted with the history of the development and consolidation of the great foundation principles of his thought. The general question, What was the nature of his teaching? may thus properly be preceded by one still more general, How came it to be what it was? To consider this latter question in relation to the *System of Synthetic Philosophy* is the purpose of the present chapter; in fulfilling which we shall not only lead up, by a kind of easy gradation, to that system itself, but shall also be able to reach some definite conclusions respecting Spencer's historic connection with the modern doctrine of evolution at large—a matter, as we shall see, of no small interest and importance.

## I.

In the first place, then, we have to review the growth and solidification of

Spencer's thought—or, in other words, to trace the growth, as exhibited in his earlier writings, of that conception of evolution which was to constitute the foundation and backbone of the *Synthetic Philosophy*. Let us begin by making ourselves acquainted with the starting-point of his mental development—that is, with the general theory of things which was current during his early years, and under the influence of which, in common with all his contemporaries, he grew to maturity.

The period of Spencer's youth and ripening manhood was a period of transition in scientific and philosophic thought. On the ushering in of the century the old cosmology still held sway with unabated vigour, along with all those time-worn dogmas concerning human life and destiny which had grown up with it during ages of ignorance and superstition, and with which its own existence was now inextricably bound up. What that cosmology and what those dogmas meant is a matter of such common history that we need not linger over them here. Suffice it to say that the almost unquestioned doctrines of special creation, fixed types, and a recent origin of the universe lay at the bottom of them all, and that it was in the light of those doctrines that the world, man, and society were all interpreted.

But before the century had got far upon its way signs began to manifest themselves of an approaching change in the higher regions of thought. The special-creation hypothesis and the postulate of the world's recent origin and rapid manufacture had served well enough so long as their field had remained uninvaded by the results of investigation—so long as they had not been confronted with definite facts. In perfect keeping with what little had been known of the universe in the darkness of the Middle Ages, they now required that nothing should be added to that knowledge to hold their place secure. But this could no longer be. The time came when investigation grew active, and definite facts, which could not be ignored, and which yet were irreverent enough to refuse to fit into the most sacred and deeply-cherished theories, began to accumulate with almost bewildering rapidity. The result was that the old conception of things began, little by little, to fall into disrepute, and the theological edifice of ages was shaken at its very foundations. Science showed, with a conclusiveness which remained untouched by all the special pleading with which her arguments and revelations were assailed, that the popular assumptions about the age of the world were absolutely untenable; that the commencement of life, and even of human life, upon our globe, so far from taking us back only a few paltry thousands of years, lay millions of ages behind us; and that such vague memorials of our race as have survived to us in sacred book and popular legend are as nothing compared with that tremendous mass of human experiences which will never find their historian. Worse than all, turning full upon the doctrine of special manufac-

ture, she opened up the grand geologic record, and read thence, as from the pages of a mighty volume, the long, stupendous story of those vast cosmic changes which, through æons of unreckoned time, have slowly moulded and fashioned the world into the condition in which we find it to-day.

That these revelations were of the most vital interest to all thinking men need hardly be said; nor is it necessary now to dwell on the feverish panic of the theologians, who hurried into the field with all their heavy artillery, prominent amid which was the great-gun argument, which had already done tremendous service on many another such occasion, that the very existence of Christianity was bound up with the story of the creation as narrated in the first chapters of the Hebrew Scriptures.\* What is here of moment is to notice the general effect of the new discoveries upon the scientific mind. That effect was at the outset almost entirely negative. The old theories had been destroyed, but as yet there was nothing to take their place; the theological interpretation of the world's history was seen to be absurdly insufficient and unreasonable, but for the time being no scientific

\* How fierce and obstinate was the opposition offered to the doctrine of evolution from this standpoint we of the present day find it no easy matter to imagine. Even such a man as Hugh Miller imported theological considerations into his scientific discussions, and, when other reasoning failed him, fell back upon the declaration that acceptance of evolution meant nullification of the central truths of Christianity. It has been reserved for a later generation, passing into a fresh phase in the history of evolutionary thought, to find out that there is, after all, no conflict between the old ideas and the new—a convenient discovery now that the new ideas can no longer be rejected.

interpretation to take its place appeared to be forthcoming. Hence followed a kind of intellectual interregnum, during which everything was vague, shifting, tentative. Meanwhile, however, things were by no means standing still. The unceasing activity of investigators in the special sciences resulted in vast accumulations of well-established facts, and thus yielded the materials in the absence of which nothing of real or permanent value could have been accomplished. And at the same time (largely, indeed, as a consequence of this extension upon all sides of the scientific domain) there was ever growing and deepening a conception of unbroken causation in cosmic changes, of the universality of law, and the unity of Nature and of natural processes—a conception in no small degree led up to by such discoveries as those of the undulatory theory of light and heat, and of the correlation of all the forces known to exact science.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in spite of the temporary suspense and hesitation, no time was being lost. As we can now see, the way was being slowly prepared for a great scientific generalisation—a generalisation which,

<sup>2</sup> This tendency towards unification was, indeed, an outgrowth from the philosophy of the eighteenth century, and was at bottom merely one expression of that general simplification of life and thought which, as Mr. Morley has pointed out, "was the keynote of the revolutionary time." (See his *Rousseau*, vol. i., pp. 4, 5; and *Introduction to the Poetical Works of Wordsworth*, p. lxi.) It was the widespread desire for synthesis, indeed, which gave rise to the systematic work of Buffon and Linnæus, and even to the great *Encyclopædia* itself. It is interesting to notice what Goldsmith, voicing the average conservative layman's opinion of his day, has to say about Montesquieu, one of the early leaders of this particular movement in speculation (*Inquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning*, chapter vi.).

overthrowing all the old positions once and for all, was in the sequel to alter fundamentally the whole current of thought, as regards not only the outer organic world and its phenomena, but also the practical problems of life and society, of morality and religion.

## II.

Such, in the briefest possible summary, was the general intellectual character of the period at which Spencer was preparing himself for the labours of his life. Even this sketch, imperfect as it necessarily is, will help us to understand the growth of his own ideas, and their relation to the changing thought of the day.

We have to go back to the year 1842, and to the series of letters on *The Proper Sphere of Government*, with which, then hardly more than a boy, he entered, as we have seen, upon his literary career.

With the pronounced individualism of this little work, which was doubtless the natural result of his home environment, though he may have owed something indirectly to the teachings of Humboldt, we have here no immediate concern. The pamphlet is significant for us from quite another point of view. In the attempt which is made in it to establish the nature, scope, and limits—that is, the fundamental principles—of civil government, there is everywhere implied a belief in the ultimate dependence of social organisation upon natural causes and natural laws. In other words, society is from first to last regarded not as a manufacture, but as a growth—a view which, though familiar enough in our own day, at all events in its theoretic aspects, was then little known, even as a matter of mere speculation. Throughout



the entire argument there run the conceptions of gradual changes naturally necessitated, and of the possibility of a better and better adjustment of man, physically, intellectually, and morally, to the needs imposed by the conditions of social life. As Spencer himself wrote, many years later, "In these letters will be found, along with many crude ideas," a "belief in the conformity of social phenomena to invariable laws," and "in human progression as determined by such laws."<sup>2</sup> All this revealed, even at so early a stage of mental growth, a well-defined tendency to regard the complicated and entangled phenomena of society from a strictly scientific point of view as phenomena exhibiting relations of cause and effect, and thus to be included in the realm of natural law. But it meant something more than this. The distinct and conscious acceptance of the doctrine that society is a thing not artificially pieced together, but of slow and natural growth, implied dissatisfaction with the current ideas of progress as an irregular and fortuitous process, and bore testimony to at least a vague germinal belief in a social development or evolution.

The questions thus raised and briefly dealt with came in for more thorough and extended treatment a few years later in Spencer's first considerable work, *Social Statics*. The conception of this volume had entered his mind not long after the appearance of the *Letters* in pamphlet form; for, owing to the rapid growth of his ideas, he soon became aware of the inadequacy of his handling of the vast problems there opened up. "The writing of *Social Statics*," he afterwards said, "arose from a dissatisfaction with the

basis on which the doctrines set forth in those letters were placed."<sup>2</sup> Even the briefest comparison of the two books is sufficient to show the enormous strides which his mind had taken during the seven critical years which divide them. In *Social Statics* almost everything is made to turn upon the doctrine—previously hardly more than hinted at—that from the very beginning of social life down to the present time there has been going on, and that still there is going on, a process of slow, but none the less certain, adjustment of the natures of men to society, and of the social organisation to the natures of its constituent units; this adjustment being the result of a perpetual interaction between units and aggregate which ever tends to bring them into more perfect adaptation the one to the other. Such adaptation, it is further contended, is produced by the direct action of circumstances upon the natures of men, and by the preservation and accumulation by inheritance from generation to generation of the modifications thus initiated; though another process comes in for passing recognition—the process of the dying out of those individuals who fail to adapt themselves to the changing conditions of their environment; which process may be conversely stated as the survival of those only who so far change as to fit themselves to the necessities imposed upon them by the totality of their surroundings. Here, it will be seen, is a faint and partial adumbration of the doctrine of the survival of the fittest in the struggle for existence. Moreover, another important point is emphasised—that all our social evils

<sup>2</sup> *Reasons for Dissenting from the Philosophy of M. Comte* (Essays, II., 137, note).

<sup>2</sup> *Reasons for Dissenting from the Philosophy of M. Comte*.



and imperfections are due to want of complete adjustment between men and the conditions of social life—are, indeed, nothing more than the temporary jarrings and wrenchings of a machine the parts of which are not yet brought into thorough working order. Yet, as the process of adaptation is still continuing, and is in the nature of things tending ever to produce between units and aggregate a state of more perfect equilibrium, the inevitable if optimistic corollary is, that the evil which we deplore will in the end work itself out altogether, and that eventually all friction will entirely disappear: a prophecy which seems to point to a realisation of the gorgeous dreams of revolutionary speculators like Condorcet and Godwin, far as the arguments upon which it is based differ from their own. Finally, all these special changes in man and in society are regarded as phases only of a process of universal development or unfolding, which is everywhere conducting, in obedience to an inherent metaphysical tendency, to the production in man, as throughout the whole of the animate creation, of more complete individuation and higher and higher types.

We thus see that, unlike Darwin and Wallace, Spencer approached the question of general evolution not from the organic, but from the super-organic point of view—by the way of ethical and sociological investigations. His first conception of development was in the limited shape of progress—of development, that is, of man individually and in society; though this whole question of progress was from the outset regarded from the side of natural law. But his was not the mind to rest content with these vague and

partial glimpses of a stupendous truth. Before long he began to work his way round, through researches of quite a different character, towards the affiliation of these special and disjointed facts and inferences upon other facts and inferences of wider sweep and meaning.

His labours upon *Social Statics* had led him to a realisation of the important truth that beneath all the much-debated questions of morality and society lie the fundamental facts of biology and psychology; and that any really scientific or efficient treatment of man as a moral being or social unit must depend upon a thorough exploration of the problems of life and mind. Full of these ideas, he turned with increased enthusiasm to biological and psychological studies; and to the prosecution of various lines of research in connection with these two subjects, a large part, though by no means the whole, of his energies was for some time devoted.

The ten years which followed—the years between 1850 and 1860 (it is well to notice the dates, because, as we shall presently see, they have their own importance)—were years of great activity—an activity to be measured not so much by their productiveness, though that was sufficiently remarkable, as by the amazing growth and organisation of ideas which took place in them. During this period some twenty-five exhaustive articles from Spencer's pen were published in the leading organs of liberal thought; and in these articles, if we take them in the order of their appearance, we can trace a gradual closing in from all sides upon the great generalisations which were by-and-bye to fall into their places as integral parts of a coherent system of thought. As a matter of fact, these years may be regarded, from the

point of view of the *Synthetic Philosophy* itself, as years of special and methodical training; and these essays, diverse as they are in form and matter, as separate and tentative contributions towards the treatment of various isolated phenomena which were ultimately to be taken up in their inter-relations and dealt with in the mass. It would be impossible here to subject these essays one by one to anything like close analysis, even if it would materially further our present purpose to do so. But a few words must be devoted to their general drift and character; and, should one or two of them be made the subjects of special mention, it will not be because these are to be considered the most significant in themselves, but simply because they are the most important for the object which at the moment I have in view.

Probably the points which would most strike anyone reading these essays for the first time would be their strong grasp upon deep-lying principles and their extraordinary originality. On every page they reveal, be the subject what it may, an astonishing independence of thought and an absolute freedom from all trace of traditional methods and ideas. It was this freshness of treatment and firmness of touch which perhaps most attracted the attention of thoughtful readers when they were first published—for the most part anonymously—in the pages of the various English magazines and reviews. But, turning back to them to-day and re-reading them in their mutual relations, we must be impressed by something beyond the depth, clearness, and vigour of mind to which they everywhere bear witness; and that something is the essential unity of their thought, the oneness of idea which is throughout seen to underlie and inform

the extraordinary diversity of materials with which they deal. It matters not whether the author is concerned with the moot questions of physiology and psychology; or with the intrinsic principles of a correct literary style; or with the changes of the sidereal system; or with ill-timed and hasty political panaceas; or with curiosities of social manners and behaviour: all these subjects are systematically approached from one point of view; all are made to cluster about and find interpretation in one dominant hypothesis. And what is this hypothesis? What is this great cardinal doctrine which is thus made to weld together subjects so diverse that on any merely superficial examination they would never be supposed to possess anything in common? It need hardly be said that it is the doctrine of development or evolution—a doctrine which manifests itself in every succeeding essay with continually increasing distinctness, and which is thus shown to be taking year after year a stronger and stronger hold upon the author's mind and a deeper and deeper place in all his speculations.

As early as 1852 he had published in a periodical called the *Leader* a short paper on "The Development Hypothesis," which was afterwards referred to by Darwin, in the historical sketch prefixed to *The Origin of Species*, as presenting the general argument for the developmental as against the special-creation interpretation of the universe with remarkable cogency and skill. But, while reasons were here briefly but clearly stated for a belief in the gradual development of all organisms, not excluding man, it must be remembered that the essay does not contain any indication of factors adequate to the production of the alleged effects. One

process only is recognised—that of direct modification by the conditions of life; and as with this process alone it is obviously impossible to account for all the facts of the organic world, the way was left open for supporters of the older doctrine to make good a temporary escape.

But this noteworthy little paper, though it contained a kind of systematised profession of faith, was only, after all, a starting-point for a long and thorough investigation of various aspects of the subject with which it was concerned. Its leading ideas, as I have said, came little by little to suffuse all his work, and in the years that followed they underwent consolidation and reached an expression at once more definite and more complete. Was it a question of deducing a theory of population from the general law of animal fertility? Then we find distinct recognition of an advance from lower to higher brought about by excessive reproduction and the continual pressure of rapidly-multiplying organisms upon the slowly-increasing means of support. Did the discussion turn upon the elaboration on a scientific basis of a true philosophy of style? Then, along with the application to the special phenomena of expression of the general law of "the line of least resistance," there is further reached the generalisation—set down as applying to all products both of man and of Nature—of the two fundamental processes of evolution, the process of differentiation and the process of integration; since it is shown that a highly-developed style "will be not a series of like parts simply placed in juxtaposition, but one whole made up of unlike parts that are mutually dependent."<sup>1</sup> Are the

right and wrong objects and methods of education brought up for consideration? Then the answer given is firmly established upon the doctrine of a gradual unfolding of the mental faculties in obedience to natural law; such unfolding taking the form of a double-sided change from the simple to the complex, and from the indefinite to the definite. So is it with all other subjects whatsoever. In the essay on *Manners and Fashion*, for example, emphasis is laid upon the truths that the various forms of restraint exercised by society as an aggregate over its individual members—such restraints being now clearly differentiated into ecclesiastical, political, and ceremonial—are all natural developments from one primordial form; and that the divergence of each from the others and of all from such primordial form takes place "in conformity with the laws of evolution of all organised bodies." And once again a similar line of argument is followed in the extremely suggestive articles on the *Genesis of Science* and the *Origin and Function of Music*. Finally, in the elaborate essay on *Progress: Its Law and Cause*, evolutionary principles are enunciated with the utmost distinctness. The law of progress is shown to consist in the transformation of the homogeneous into the heterogeneous (an imperfect statement afterwards completed by the addition of a factor for the time being overlooked<sup>2</sup>); and this process is illustrated by examples taken from all orders of phenomena, while the cause of the transformation is found in the law of the multiplication of effects, afterwards worked out fully in *First Principles*.

<sup>2</sup> This additional factor being, as we shall presently see, increase in coherence. A change must consist in increasing heterogeneity and increasing coherence, to constitute evolution.

<sup>1</sup> *The Philosophy of Style*. First published in the *Westminster Review*, October, 1852.



In this essay, too, as in that on the *Development Hypothesis*, the general law of evolution is presented as holding good in the production of species and varieties, though here again direct adaptation to the conditions of existence is the only factor recognised as playing a part in the stupendous drama of unfolding life.

### III.

I have said enough, I think, to show how active was the period with which we have just been dealing—active alike in original production, in the absorption of fresh material, and in the organisation of new ideas. But these five-and-twenty essays do not represent the whole of Spencer's labours during this time. His studies in psychology, of which the essays of *The Universal Postulate* (1853) and *The Art of Education* (1854) were the immediate results, took more systematic form about the date of the publication of the latter paper; and in 1855 the first edition of his *Principles of Psychology* made its appearance. As this work was subsequently included as a portion of the two volumes on the *Principles of Psychology* in the Synthetic System, any analysis of its contents does not fall within the scope of the present chapter. One remark may, however, be appropriately made ere we pass on. Ignoring for the moment the immense developments of psychology during the past half-century, and taking the purely historic point of view, it is well that we should remind ourselves how enormously this book was in advance of the whole thought of the time—not the common thought only, but the cultivated thought as well.\* It was in the

fullest sense of the term an epoch-making book, because it placed the study of mind upon an entirely new basis, and, by applying to it that hypothesis of evolution which, for the time being, even the biologists refused to accept, indicated a fresh method of inquiry which in the long run has entirely revolutionised the subject. Hitherto, mental philosophy had concerned itself only with the facts of adult human consciousness. Spencer, breaking away from all the traditions of the schools, started out on an original course of investigation, in the wide sweep of which he took in not only the mental growth of children and savages, but also the phenomena of intelligence as displayed by the whole range of the animate world down to the lowest creatures. To quote his own words, "Life in its multitudinous and infinitely varied embodiments has arisen out of the lowest and

Stuart Mill. The bias of this distinguished thinker in favour of the experiential philosophy was so strong that he hesitated to accept the compromise which the developmental view offered to effect between the special doctrines of his own school of pure empiricism and those of the intuitionists. Yet he came at length to recognise how large a step in advance the evolutionists had really made. Dr. Carpenter, referring to Mill's gradual change of front, quotes from a letter addressed to him on the subject by Mill himself, part of which runs as follows: "There is also considerable evidence that such acquired facilities of passing into certain modes of cerebral action can in many cases be transmitted more or less completely by inheritance. The limits of this transmission and the conditions on which it depends are a subject now fairly before the scientific world; and we shall doubtless in time know much more about them than we do now. But so far as my imperfect knowledge of the subject extends, I take much the same view of it that you do, at least in principle." (See Carpenter's *Principles of Mental Physiology*.)

\* How true this was may be strikingly shown by a consideration of the attitude taken up towards the evolutionary psychology by John

simplest beginnings by steps as gradual as those which evolved an homogeneous germ into a complete organism." Clearly, then, the whole conception of the work is evolutionary. As Spencer many years afterwards wrote of it, the development hypothesis, though not distinctly proclaimed till towards the close, is tacitly implied on almost every page.<sup>1</sup>

It is not, I think, needful to pause, after even such a rapid summary of the activities of these ten memorable years, to say anything about the extraordinary perversion of judgment which has led critics from whom, having regard to their position and general culture, something better might have been expected, to treat these writings as "stock-writings," and to refer to their author as having "the weakness of omniscience" and a desire to discourse on all kinds of subjects. We are now in a fair position to realise how much, or rather how little, these curiosities of oracular criticism are really worth. So far from Spencer's various essays during this decade being merely examples of journalistic versatility (as such estimates would imply), we have seen how they are united and held together by that thread of common principle and common purpose which runs through them all. Casual and unrelated as they may appear to superficial readers, they may, broadly speaking, be regarded as separate and methodical studies in preparation for a complete working out in general and in detail of the doctrine they all illustrate—the doctrine of universal evolution.

Here one important point has to be emphasised. The real significance of Spencer's versatility is missed if we fail to take account of the fact that in treating

of all sorts of different topics, from the Nebular Hypothesis to manners, fashions, architectural types, music, dancing, and the characteristics of style, he made substantial contributions to the discussion of nearly all of them. Specialists in almost every field acknowledge their indebtedness to him, and find it necessary, even when it is only to express disagreement, to take his speculations into consideration, and define their own position in regard to them. This is not, of course, because Spencer himself wrote as a specialist upon all these various themes. Comprehensive as his erudition was, this would have been impossible. The explanation must rather be sought in his extraordinary penetration, and even more particularly (as I have elsewhere shown<sup>2</sup>) in his marvellous powers of generalisation. It seemed as if in his hands facts apparently the most alien entered into wholly unexpected relationships; as if the phenomena under study, whatever the line of inquiry might be, grouped themselves of their own accord into such patterns as to make recognition of the laws they exemplified inevitable.

#### IV.

The foregoing survey of Spencer's earlier and more miscellaneous writings should have interest and value because both of the light that it throws upon his mental growth and of the help it may presently give us in the study of his later systematic work. But, beyond this, I have had, in taking it, a more special object in view. For it is only by reference to such a record that we can understand Spencer's historic position in modern thought—that is, his true relation to the great doctrine of evolution.

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography*, i., 469.

<sup>2</sup> *Westminster Review*, January, 1904.

On this question I want to make myself as clear as possible, because it is one in reference to which there has long been and is still current a great deal of misconception, even among the generally well informed. Vagueness and instability in the meaning of certain words in common use have been in this case, as often elsewhere, a main cause of confusion in ideas; another instance being thus furnished of the truth of Bacon's dictum that, while we fondly suppose that we govern our vocabulary, it not infrequently happens that, as a matter of fact, our vocabulary governs us. In the common speech of the day the word "Darwinism" is almost invariably employed as if it were absolutely synonymous with the word "evolution"; the one is treated as being at all points not only coextensive, but also cointensive with the other. Two notable results of this indiscrimination are: first, that Darwin is habitually regarded as the author of the modern doctrine of evolution at large; and, secondly, that this doctrine has, ever since the publication of his *Origin of Species*, become so intimately bound up with the special views therein contained that by the soundness or unsoundness of his arguments the whole theory of evolution is supposed to stand or fall.

That all this has given rise to much deplorable confusion in the discussion of evolutionary questions in general, I do not now pause to show. Here we are concerned merely with the entirely unjust and erroneous estimate of the historical significance of Spencer's work, and consequently of the relations of Spencer himself to the greatest of modern generalisations, which originated from, or which at least has been largely kept alive by, the misconception of which I speak.

To what extent this unjust and erroneous estimate has taken root, even in more cultivated thought, may be shown briefly and conclusively by one or two quotations. For example, we find the *Saturday Review* remarking, in the course of an article on Professor Tyndall's famous Belfast Address, now some thirty years since, that "what Darwin has done for physiology [!] Spencer would do for psychology, by applying to the nervous system particularly the principles which his teacher had already enunciated for the physical system generally." In much the same strain, and obviously under the same impression that Spencer's ideas were all obtained at second-hand,<sup>1</sup> and are, in fact, little more than precarious inferences from other people's discoveries, an American writer of some eminence, Colonel Higginson, once declared: "It seems rather absurd to attribute to him [Spencer] as a scientific achievement any vast enlargement or further generalisation of the modern scientific doctrine of evolution." Once more, sketching

<sup>1</sup> There has perhaps never been so original a thinker as Spencer, who has had such a hard struggle to get or keep possession of the credit due to his own ideas. Not only is he thus reduced to the position of a mere aide-de-camp to Darwin, but many of his critics are never weary in insisting, in spite of all disproof of their assertions, upon his vital indebtedness to Auguste Comte. Even his educational theories have repeatedly been traced back to Rousseau's *Émile*, though, as he himself informed me, he had never even heard of that work at the time his own book on education was written (see my *Rousseau and Naturalism in Life and Thought*, p. 206, note). The singularly distorted current ideas of his general relation to evolution, above animadverted upon, may be partly the results of the anonymity of his earlier publications; and all wrong-headedness is marvellously tenacious of life.



the college life of his friend, the late lamented Professor Clifford, with whose untimely death so many brilliant promises came to naught, Sir Frederick Pollock says: "Meanwhile, he [Clifford] was eagerly assimilating the ideas which had become established as an assured possession of science by Mr. Darwin, and were being applied to the systematic grouping and gathering together of human knowledge by Mr. Herbert Spencer." Similarly, a professed historian of philosophy—M. Lefèvre—refers to Spencer as "relying on the marvellous conjectures of Darwin." And, finally (not to weary by needlessly multiplying quotations), a man from whom, on account of his own contributions to psychology and wide knowledge of English thought, a more correct judgment might surely have been looked for—the late M. Taine—thus summed up his view of Spencer's work: "Mr. Spencer possesses the rare merit of having extended to the sum of phenomena—to the whole history of Nature and of mind—the two master-thoughts which for the past thirty years have been giving new form to the positive sciences; the one being Mayer and Joule's Conservation of Energy, the other Darwin's Natural Selection."

Now, all this, to the extent to which expressly or by implication it relegates Spencer to the position merely of an adapter, enlarger, or populariser of other men's thoughts, is entirely false and unfounded, as the rapid survey of his earlier writings which we have just taken makes absolutely clear. So far from its seeming "rather absurd" to credit Spencer with any great personal contribution to the formulation of the doctrine of evolution; so far from his being in any sense of the term a pupil or unattached follower of Darwin; we

have seen that he had worked his own way independently, from a different starting-point and through an entirely dissimilar course of investigation, to a conception of evolution as a universal process underlying all phenomena, before Darwin himself had made public his special study of the operation of one of the factors of evolution in the limited sphere of the organic world. A simple comparison of dates will serve to set this matter at rest. The first edition of the *Origin of Species* was published in the latter part of 1859. The essay on the *Development Hypothesis*, in which the transformation theory was stoutly maintained, appeared in 1852; in 1855—or four years before the advent of Darwin's book—there came the first edition of the *Principles of Psychology*, in which the laws of evolution (already conceived as universal) were traced out in their operations in the domain of mind; and this was followed in 1857 by the essay on *Progress: Its Law and Cause*, which contains a statement of the doctrine of evolution in its chief outlines, and an inductive and deductive development of that doctrine in its application to all classes of phenomena. Spencer's independence of Darwin is thus placed beyond possibility of question.

Let it not be imagined that I am endeavouring in the slightest degree to underestimate the special value of Darwin's work. Yielding him the fullest meed of praise for the immense part which he played in the development of scientific thought, I am aiming only to show, as simple justice requires to be shown, and as, with the fine modesty which characterised him, he himself endeavoured to show, that it is historically incorrect to speak of him as the father of the modern doctrine of

evolution. What Darwin did was to amass an enormous number of facts from almost every department of biological science, and by the persistent labour, patient examination, and searching thought of many studious years, to establish, once and for all, not the reality of evolution, nor even the laws and conditions of evolution, but the operation of one of the main factors of evolution—a factor which, though it had till his time entirely eluded the scientific mind, was yet required to render comprehensible a vast array of phenomena otherwise without interpretation. How near Spencer's own investigations had led him to a realisation of the process of natural selection, or, as he afterwards called it, the survival of the fittest in the struggle for existence, we have already been able to remark; and he himself took occasion to point this out when, in the course of his later work, he came to deal more systematically with the whole problem of animal fertility and its practical implications.\* But the factors mainly relied

upon by him, in common with all pre-Darwinian developmentalists, were the direct action of the environment and the inheritance, with increase, of functionally-produced modifications; and as these processes, whatever may be their individual importance, are obviously incapable of throwing light upon a large part—indeed, the larger part—of the facts which pressed for explanation, the theory of evolution could not for the time being hope for inductive establishment. Darwin's book put the whole question upon a new foundation, by exhibiting a process which *did* account for the hitherto unmanageable facts; and undoubtedly it was thus to a large extent effectual in bringing the general theory into open court as an entertainable hypothesis. But while all this is freely conceded—while the greatness of Darwin's work in itself, and its importance as a contribution to scientific thought, are acknowledged without hesitation, it has still to be remembered that that work was special and limited in

\* See *Principles of Biology*, § 373, note. The whole of this very interesting note should be studied carefully, not only because it makes clear the scientific relations of Spencer and Darwin, but also for the foreshadowing which it contains of a reaction against that exclusive recognition of natural selection which soon became typical of biological students at large. The fundamental fact of evolution being now universally accepted, scientists of the present day are divided into two hostile camps upon the question of the processes of evolution: one party, often described as the neo-Darwinian, holding to natural selection, and to that alone; the other, antithetically called the neo-Lamarckian, maintaining that other factors have to be taken into account. The controversy, which mainly turns upon the problem as to whether or not acquired characters are inheritable, is now for the most part immediately connected with the writings of Professor Weismann, in which an elaborate

attempt is made to prove that, of all alleged evolutionary factors, natural selection is alone demanded by facts and supported by evidence. Spencer himself remained firm to the position adopted in the note just referred to, his contributions to the discussion being the essays on *The Factors of Organic Evolution* (1886); *A Counter-Criticism* (1888); *The Inadequacy of Natural Selection* (1893); and *A Rejoinder to Professor Weismann* (1893). It may be interesting to add that, when he came to write of the appearance of the *Origin of Species*, Spencer could not remember whether he was vexed at the time by the thought that in 1852 he had failed to carry further the idea then expressed, "that among human beings the survival of those who are the select of their generation is a cause of development." On the whole, he did not doubt that, if any such feelings arose, they were overwhelmed by gratification on seeing the theory of organic evolution at length fully justified (*Autobiography*, ii., 59).

character, and that with the general doctrine of evolution at large it had itself nothing whatever to do. The laws of evolution as a universal process—a matter which the aims and objects of Darwin's work did not lead him to touch—were worked out by Spencer irrespectively of the special process of natural selection; and when Darwin's book appeared, that process fell into its place in his general system, quite naturally, as a single manifestation of a far wider law—the law of equilibration, and therefore as a supplementary, and not in any way as a disturbing, element. Thus it appears that if any one man is to be looked upon as the immediate progenitor of a doctrine which, in common phraseology, may be said to have been to some extent in the

air—a “truth of science, waiting to be caught”—that man is not he who first elucidated one factor of its process in one domain of phenomena—the biological; but rather he who first seized upon it as a comprehensive law, underlying all the phenomena of the universe. In a word, it is not Charles Darwin, but Herbert Spencer.

We have thus followed the general course of Spencer's thought through what, in the light of his subsequent work, must be regarded as the period of experiment and preparation. We now turn from these earlier writings to that colossal undertaking to which the greater part of the energies of his after-life was to be devoted—the *System of Synthetic Philosophy*.

### CHAPTER III.

## THE SYNTHETIC PHILOSOPHY—FIRST PRINCIPLES—THE PRINCIPLES OF BIOLOGY AND OF PSYCHOLOGY.

### I.

EARLY in the course of the composition of the *Principles of Psychology* in their original form—that is, in 1854—Spencer had reached that conception of evolution as a universal process which he subsequently worked out in detail in the essay on *Progress: Its Law and Cause*. The writing of this article, which first saw the light in the *Westminster Review* for April, 1857, doubtless helped in

large measure to systematise and co-ordinate the various ideas that were then lying scattered in his mind. It was in the following year, while he was engaged in preparing a long essay in defence of the Nebular Hypothesis, that there dawned upon him the possibility of dealing in a more methodical and connected manner than he had hitherto found practicable with those foundation-principles of evolution which he had been gradually formulating during the



miscellaneous studies of the past eight or nine years. Instead of treating the diverse phenomena of life and society in a fragmentary manner, why should he not consider them after some orderly plan and in their mutual relationships? The idea took root, developed rapidly, and before long assumed the proportions of an elaborate scheme, in which all orders of concrete phenomena were to fall into their places as illustrations of the fundamental process of evolution. Thus the conception of evolution now presented itself to him as the basis of a system of thought under which was to be generalised the complete history of the knowable universe, and by virtue of which all knowledge was to be unified by the affiliation of its various branches upon the ultimate laws underlying them all. Such was the origin of the *Synthetic Philosophy*.

Though a rough sketch of the main outlines of the system as they occurred to him at the time was mapped out almost immediately,<sup>1</sup> it was not till the following year, 1859—a year otherwise made memorable by the publication of Darwin's book—that a detailed plan of the various connected works in which these conceptions were to be developed was finally drawn up; and not till March, 1860, that it was made public in the form of a prospectus. Spencer's original intention was to issue the proposed work to subscribers in periodical parts. This course was persevered in till the publication of the forty-fourth division, in 1876, completing the first volume of the *Principles of Sociology*. It was then discontinued, and from that date onward the publication was in volume form only.

The following is a reprint, slightly

condensed by the omission of some explanatory matter not now of any special interest, of the programme as originally given to the world:—

#### FIRST PRINCIPLES.

PART I. The Unknowable. Carrying a step further the doctrine put into shape by Hamilton and Mansel; pointing out the various directions in which science leads to the same conclusions; and showing that in this united belief in an Absolute that transcends not only human knowledge, but human conception, lies the only possible reconciliation of Science and Religion.

II. Laws of the Knowable. A statement of the ultimate principles discernible throughout all manifestations of the Absolute—those highest generalisations now being disclosed by Science which are severally true not of one class of phenomena, but of *all* classes of phenomena; and which are thus the keys to all classes of phenomena.

[In logical order should here come the application of these First Principles to Inorganic Nature. But this great division it is proposed to pass over; partly because, even without it, the scheme is too extensive; partly because the interpretation of Organic Nature after the proposed method is of more immediate importance. The second work of the series will therefore be—]

#### THE PRINCIPLES OF BIOLOGY.

##### Vol. I.

PART I. The Data of Biology. Including those general truths of physics and chemistry with which rational biology must set out.

II. The Inductions of Biology. A statement of the leading generalisations which naturalists, physiologists, and comparative anatomists have established.

III. The Evolution of Life. Concerning the speculation commonly known as the Development Hypothesis—its *à priori* and *à posteriori* evidences.

##### Vol. II.

IV. Morphological Development. Pointing out the relations that are everywhere traceable between organic forms and the average of the various forces to which they are subject; and seeking in the cumulative effects of such forces a theory of the forms.

<sup>1</sup> See *Autobiography*, ii., 15, 16.

V. Physiological Development. The progressive differentiation of functions similarly traced; and similarly interpreted as consequent upon the exposure of different parts of organisms to different sets of conditions.

VI. The Laws of Multiplication. Generalisations respecting the rates of reproduction of the various classes of plants and animals; followed by an attempt to show the dependence of these variations upon certain necessary causes.

## THE PRINCIPLES OF PSYCHOLOGY.

### Vol. I.

PART I. The Data of Psychology. Treating of the general connections of mind and life, and their relations to other modes of the Unknowable.<sup>1</sup>

II. The Inductions of Psychology. A digest of such generalisations respecting mental phenomena as have already been empirically established.

III. General Synthesis. A republication, with additional chapters, of the same part in the already published *Principles of Psychology*.

IV. Special Synthesis. A republication, with extensive revisions and additions, of the same part, etc., etc.

V. Physical Synthesis. An attempt to show the manner in which the succession of states of consciousness conforms to a certain fundamental law of nervous action that follows from the First Principles laid down at the outset.

### Vol. II.

VI. Special Analysis. As at present published, but further elaborated by some additional chapters.

VII. General Analysis. As at present published, with several explanations and additions.

VIII. Corollaries. Consisting in part of a number of derivative principles which form a necessary introduction to Sociology.

## THE PRINCIPLES OF SOCIOLOGY.

### Vol. I.

PART I. The Data of Sociology. A statement of the several sets of factors entering into social phenomena—human ideas and feelings considered in their necessary order of evolution; surrounding natural conditions; and those ever-complicating conditions to which Society itself gives origin.

II. The Inductions of Sociology. General facts, structural and functional, as gathered from a survey of societies and their changes; in other words, the empirical generalisations that are arrived at by comparing different societies and successive phases of the same society.

III. Political Organisation. The evolution of governments, general and local, as determined by natural causes; their several types and metamorphoses; their increasing complexity and specialisation; and the progressive limitation of their functions.

### Vol. II.

IV. Ecclesiastical Organisation. Tracing the differentiation of religious government from secular; its successive complications and the multiplication of sects; the growth and continued modification of religious ideas, as caused by advancing knowledge and changing moral character; and the gradual reconciliation of these ideas with the truths of abstract science.

V. Ceremonial Organisation. The natural history of that third kind of government which, having a common root with the others, and slowly becoming separate from and supplementary to them, serves to regulate the minor actions of life.<sup>1</sup>

VI. Industrial Organisation. The development of productive and distributive agencies considered, like the foregoing, in its necessary causes; comprehending not only the progressive division of labour and the increasing complexity of each industrial agency, but also the successive forms of industrial government as passing through like phases with political government.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In their published form these three divisions are entitled respectively: *Political Institutions*; *Ecclesiastical Institutions*; *Ceremonial Institutions*; and the last named is properly made to take precedence of the other two. A part on *Domestic Institutions* is inserted (as Part III.) after the Inductions, and this of course disturbs the subsequent numbering of the divisions, as well as, to some extent, the volume arrangement; the first two volumes, as outlined, having expanded into three.

<sup>2</sup> This division and the whole of Vol. III. were skipped by Spencer when, led by increasingly poor health to the belief that the entire scheme could never be carried out, he decided at all hazards to push on with the far more

## Vol. III.

VII. Lingual Progress. The evolution of languages regarded as a psychological process determined by social conditions.

VIII. Intellectual Progress. Treated from the same point of view: including the growth of classifications; the evolution of science out of common knowledge; the advance from qualitative to quantitative prevision, from the indefinite to the definite, and from the concrete to the abstract.

IX. Æsthetic Progress. The fine arts similarly dealt with: tracing their gradual differentiation from primitive institutions and from each other; their increasing varieties of development; and their advance in reality of expression and superiority of aim.

X. Moral Progress. Exhibiting the genesis of the slow emotional modifications which human nature undergoes in its adaptation to the social state.

XI. The Consensus. Treating of the necessary interdependence of structures and of functions in each type of society and in the successive phases of social development.

## THE PRINCIPLES OF MORALITY.

## Vol. I.

PART I. The Data of Morality. Generalisations furnished by biology, psychology, and sociology, which underlie a true theory of right living; in other words, the elements of that equilibrium between constitution and conditions of existence which is at once the moral ideal and the limit towards which we are progressing.

II. The Inductions of Morality. Those empirically established rules of human action which are registered as essential laws by all civilised nations: that is to say, the generalisations of expediency.

III. Personal Morals. The principles of private conduct—physical, intellectual, moral, and religious—that follow from the conditions to complete individual life; or,

important volumes on Ethics. The *Sociology* was ultimately completed by the publication of divisions on *Professional Institutions* and *Industrial Institutions*; but in these the matter was less thoroughly organised than in preceding parts, and in places signs of haste and weariness were quite apparent. Vol. III., as originally planned, had by this time been dropped from the scheme.

what is the same thing, those modes of private action which must result from the eventual equilibration of internal desires and external needs.

## Vol. II.

IV. Justice.<sup>\*</sup> The mutual limitations of men's actions, necessitated by their coexistence as units of a society—limitations the perfect observance of which constitutes that state of equilibrium forming the goal of political progress.

V. Negative Beneficence. Those secondary limitations, similarly necessitated, which, though less important and not cognisable by law, are yet requisite to prevent mutual destruction of happiness in various indirect ways: in other words, those minor self-restraints, dictated by what may be called passive sympathy.

VI. Positive Beneficence. Comprehending all modes of conduct, dictated by active sympathy, which imply pleasure in giving pleasure—modes of conduct that social adaptation has induced and must render ever more general; and which, in becoming universal, must fill to the full the possible measure of human happiness.

I reproduce this historic document here for two reasons. First, it is important for the student of Spencer to have under his eye for reference and guidance such a general programme of the scope and aim of the system as a whole, and of the concatenation of its various parts. And, secondly, it is instructive to observe with what fidelity Spencer, in working out his system, adhered to his original plan. Any one who compares the above prospectus with the contents of the ten volumes in which the *Synthetic Philosophy* was finally embodied, can

<sup>\*</sup> This part is practically co-extensive with *Social Statics*. Among various points of difference in the treatment of the same questions between the earlier and the later work, one specially calls for remark. In *Justice* the supernaturalistic elements of *Social Statics* have disappeared, and the whole discussion is based firmly on a naturalistic foundation.



hardly fail to be astonished by the remarkable correspondence between the original design and the completed edifice. Here and there changes will be noted in the order of the divisions; there are several considerable additions to the scheme; and, more important than all, the parts which were to have composed the third volume of the *Sociology* are left out altogether.<sup>1</sup> Otherwise, Spencer adhered to his prospectus with a fidelity which shows how fully he must have had the whole vast territory mapped out in his mind before he sat down to commit himself to the penning of a single line.

## II.

The philosophic system of which we have thus before us an abstract or syllabus differs from all other comprehensive bodies of thought with which in its external characteristics it might be compared, alike in its method and its scope. In approaching the study of the *Synthetic Philosophy* we must try first to understand its uniqueness in both of these respects.

<sup>1</sup> That the *Sociology* none the less actually comprises three volumes is due to the expansion of the first two. There can, I think, be little reason to regret that Spencer abandoned his original intention of dealing with linguistic, intellectual, and æsthetic progress. Great as will be our gain when these subjects are systematically treated on the basis of evolution, Spencer himself was prepared neither by sympathy nor by training to do full justice to them; and though without question he would have said many things about them which would have been illuminating and suggestive, his discussion of them must necessarily, on the whole, have been unsatisfactory. Meanwhile, the gaps left are to some extent filled by certain of his essays—notably those on *The Genesis of Science*, *The Origin and Function of Music*, and *The Philosophy of Style*.

In the early days of philosophic speculation it was sufficient if, in the building up of his elaborate structure of doctrine, the thinker succeeded in making the various parts of his system coherent and harmonious among themselves. So long as they would hang together without internal friction or disorder, so long as in this way they would, verbally considered, produce the impression of organic unity, nothing more was required. How far they might or might not be congruous with the actual laws and processes of the universe was a question which, in the then condition of knowledge, was of comparatively small importance. Thus the Platos of old days, and the Hegels of more recent times, could start from whatever datum they chose to postulate, and spin their poetic webs of fanciful metaphysics without troubling themselves very seriously to consider whether the facts of the world were for or against them. In the former case, well and good; in the latter, *tant pis pour les faits*: in either event their work went on uninterrupted and untrammelled.<sup>2</sup> Wherever they looked out on the universe they saw nothing but a reflection of their own whims and theories; reminding us of Coleridge's brilliant metaphor of Jack Robinson between two mirrors, prolonged into an endless succession of Jack Robinsons. But Science, in opening up the arcana

<sup>2</sup> In Lord Bolingbroke's *Letter to Alexander Pope* there is a passage even more appropriate to certain later philosophers than to those he himself had in view when penning it: "Rather than creep up slowly, *à posteriori*, to a little general knowledge, they soar at once as far and as high as imagination can carry them. From thence they descend again, armed with systems and arguments *à priori*; and, regardless how these agree or clash with the phenomena of Nature, they impose them on mankind."

of the universe, has passed all such methods under summary condemnation. The fabled German is said, in the familiar story, to have evolved a camel out of the depths of his inner consciousness; and the monstrosity which he boldly offered to the world would have done well enough so long as no real camel had been examined and studied. But the importation of a genuine animal into the matter at once changes the attitude and increases the responsibilities of the would-be naturalist. His description of the camel must now not only possess the qualities of internal balance and abstract credibility, but must also meet the additional requirement of resemblance to the actual camel of zoology. The parable hardly needs a gloss. For this simply means that all philosophy worthy of the name must henceforth build upon foundations firmly laid in scientific truth. Any system that neglects science as its corner-stone stands self-condemned, and does not merit serious attention.

Now, the first characteristic mark of the Spencerian philosophy is that its vast superstructure is reared not independently of science, still less in spite of science, but out of the very materials that science itself has furnished. It is a body of doctrine which is not only verbally intelligible and logically harmonious within itself, but at every point challenges the supreme test of direct comparison with fact. Spencer proceeds in his task of organising knowledge by first examining separately the various concrete sciences in quest of the highest truth or truths that these will each yield; then, setting together the generalisations thus reached, he formulates from these the still wider generalisation in which they all merge. Close

analysis of this widest generalisation then reveals the ultimate axiom—a datum which, as referable to nothing beyond or behind itself, must be taken, so to speak, upon its own credentials, and accepted both as the final result of our inductive inquiry, and, in turn, as the foundation or the starting-point of any attempt at the synthetic, or deductive, reconstruction of philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Induction, then, is the method pursued from the first; the established truths of science are directly investigated; and by generalisation after generalisation—each tried and verified again and again by reference to all orders of concrete facts—we are led at last to a generalisation which comprises them all, beyond which we cannot venture without losing ourselves in mere speculation, and in which, therefore, we have to rest. I shall endeavour in a moment to indicate the course of inquiry and thought which Spencer followed in thus working his way to the first principles of his philosophy. But here let me point out at once that, though this method of induction was rigidly adhered to, until its final results were obtained, those results were not allowed to remain in inductive form. This would have been to leave the system incomplete, for, while the processes of universal evolution would have been set forth, no *rationale* of those processes would have been suggested. As we shall presently see more clearly, the

<sup>2</sup> It is well not to lose sight of the fact that the most rigid method of induction does not relieve us of the obligation of postulating an unproved and unprovable principle. We must fasten the final link of our chain somewhere, if we have to introduce the foot of Jove for the purpose. Otherwise, our philosophy is without a basis, like the old Hindu theory of the universe. See the essay on "Mill *versus* Hamilton" (*Essays*, vol. ii.).

very purpose of philosophy demands that the laws of the universe revealed by induction shall be re-stated deductively. This re-statement Spencer undertakes in detail, exhibiting the laws revealed by his most comprehensive generalisations as necessary consequences of the ultimate datum to which they at last bring us. Hence the logical completeness of the Spencerian philosophy. It presents us on the one side with an empirical account of the laws and processes of the knowable universe, and then, translating these into deductive terms, it furnishes us with a rational history of the knowable universe as well.

What further has to be said about the building of the *Synthetic Philosophy* may be conveniently postponed until we come to consider the evolution of its fundamental principles. To clear the way for this, we have, first of all, however, to deal with another point. What meaning does Spencer himself attach to the word "philosophy"? What are the scope and limitations of his own work? Or, to phrase the question differently, what is it that, in the development of his system, he really undertakes to do?

The older philosophers demanded an explanation of existence; the problem for which they sought a solution was ontological—the problem of the nature of things; and, not content with the study of the phenomenal universe, they endeavoured to sound the mystery of absolute being. What is the primary cause of the cosmos? What is its final cause—the end for which it exists? These, and such as these, were the questions which generations of metaphysicians busied themselves to answer. With what result? With the result that failure followed every effort, and that every scheme, no matter how carefully planned, how

ingeniously developed, how attractive and plausible, was sooner or later forced to take its place among the curiosities of misapplied effort in the intellectual lumber-heap of the world. The futility of all the study devoted in the past to these perennially fascinating but perennially elusive questions—the absurdities that each fresh speculator will freely acknowledge as the characteristics of every system but his own—the total inadequacy of each new master-word to roll back for us the eternal gates that shut from human knowledge the final mystery of life: all these things in themselves sufficed to lead some of the clearest and sanest intellects of earlier days to an appreciation of the truth that the old-world riddle remains unsolved simply because it is insoluble.\* Renewed efforts to read the enigma of the Sphinx can only result, therefore, in the same disappointment. What has never been accomplished in the past will never be accomplished in the future, merely because, in its very essence, the task is hopeless. Modern psychology shows us the reason of the inevitable failure by making clear the conditions under which all our thinking must be done—conditions which, when

\* Goethe—among the first to appreciate to the full the philosophic consequences of the limitations of human faculty—again and again insisted that our business is with the laws and conditions of the phenomenal universe, and not with the ultimate mystery that lies behind them.

"Wie? Wann? und Wo?

Die Götter blieben stumm.

Du halte dich ans Weil,

Und frage nicht Warum!"

Elsewhere he writes to this effect: "Man is born not to solve the problem of the universe, but to find out where the problem begins, and then to restrain himself within the limits of the comprehensible."



once duly recognised, reveal beyond the shadow of doubt or the possibility of question why it has been, is, and ever must be, futile for the human intelligence to attempt to rise from the relative and the phenomenal into the consideration of that absolute and noumenal existence of which these are but the manifestations.

Now, by philosophy—to begin with a negative statement of the matter—Spencer does not understand an effort to solve the ultimate problem of the universe. He postulates two categories—the Unknowable and the Knowable; and to the former of these, the proper domain of religion, he relegates, as lying beyond the scope of our inquiry, all those questions concerning the primary and final cause of the universe—its *whence*, its *why*, and its *wherefore*—with which all metaphysics have been principally concerned. What, then, is left us? The answer is simple. The true subject-matter of philosophy is not the problem of absolute cause and end, but of secondary causes and ends—not noumenal and unconditioned existence, but the manifestations of the noumenal in and through the conditioned and phenomenal. What we demand from philosophy, therefore, is not an explanation of the universe in terms of Being as distinguished from appearance; but a complete co-ordination, or systematic organisation, of those cosmical laws by which we symbolise the processes of the universe, and the interrelations of the various phenomena of which the universe, as revealed to us under the conditions of our intelligence, is actually composed. The old antithesis between common knowledge and what we call science on the one hand, and philosophy on the other, thus disappears. They are not essentially unlike; their differences

are differences in degree of generality and unification. "As each widest generalisation of science comprehends and consolidates the narrower generalisations of its own division, so the generalisations of philosophy comprehend and consolidate the widest generalisations of science. It is, therefore, a knowledge the extreme opposite in kind to that which experience first accumulates. It is the final product of that process which begins with a mere colligation of crude observations, goes on establishing propositions that are broader and more separated from particular cases, and ends in universal propositions. Or, to bring the definition to its simplest and clearest form: Knowledge of the lowest kind is *ununified* knowledge; science is *partially-unified* knowledge; philosophy is *completely-unified* knowledge."<sup>1</sup>

### III.

Such, then, are the methods and scope of the *Synthetic Philosophy*. We proceed now to the briefest possible statement of its foundation principles, merely premising that readers who are not specially interested in the more technical side of philosophic discussion may do well to pass on at once to the exposition of the doctrine of evolution in the next section.

If philosophy is to undertake the complete unification of knowledge, it is clear that it must establish some ultimate proposition which includes and consolidates all the results of experience. It is impossible for us here to follow Spencer, step by step, in the long and subtle argument by which this ultimate proposition is reached. In such broad statement as alone is compatible with

<sup>1</sup> *First Principles*, § 37.

the purposes we have now in view, the main stages of the inquiry may be just indicated, and no more. Philosophy, then, in the nature of things must start with certain assumptions, justifying them, as it goes on with its work, by exhibiting their congruity with all other dicta of consciousness. This is a proposition from which manifestly we cannot dissent without committing ourselves to absolute nihilism. Yet involved in it there is one primordial datum—the assumption (without which all thought would be impossible) that in the manifestations of the unknowable in and through the phenomenal universe congruities and incongruities exist and are cognisable by us. Setting out from this assumption, Spencer goes on to show that in the last analysis all classes of likeness and unlikeness merge in one great difference—the difference between object and subject. The profoundest distinction among the manifestations of the unknowable we recognise by grouping them into *self* and *not-self*.<sup>1</sup> His postulates, therefore, are “an unknowable power; the existence of knowable likenesses and differences among the manifestations of that power; and a resulting segregation of those manifestations into those of subject and object.”<sup>2</sup> These are postulates which common sense asserts, which in every step science takes for granted, and which no metaphysician has ever succeeded in destroying; and from these philosophy has to proceed to the achievement of its purpose as above set forth.

Pushing the argument through a consideration of space, time, matter, motion, force, the indestructibility of matter, and

the continuity of force, Spencer at length reaches his ultimate dictum—the persistence of force; by which “we really mean the persistence of some Cause which transcends our knowledge and conception.”<sup>3</sup> This dictum—that the Force of the Universe is constant, since it “can neither arise out of nothing, nor lapse into nothing,” and can, therefore, be neither added to nor destroyed—is shown to possess the highest kind of axiomatic certitude for two reasons: it constitutes the required foundation for all other general truths; and it is a psychological necessity—that is, it remains stable and unresolvable—the one inexpugnable, yet inexplicable, element of consciousness. Of such persistence of force under the forms of matter and motion all phenomena are necessary results. Eliminate this conception, and consciousness collapses. “The sole truth which transcends experience by underlying it is thus the Persistence of Force. This, being the basis of experience, must be the basis of any scientific organisation of experiences. To this an ultimate analysis brings us down, and on this a rational synthesis must build up.”<sup>4</sup>

The first deduction drawn from this ultimate universal truth is that of the persistence of relations among forces, or what is commonly known as the uniformity of law, whence we pass to two important corollaries—the transformation and equivalence of forces (correlation) and the undulatory character, or rhythm of motion. The first of these follows naturally from the truth that, however much forces may change their form, the force of the universe remains constant; the latter is just as clearly a

<sup>1</sup> *First Principles*, § 44.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, § 45.

<sup>3</sup> *First Principles*, § 62.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, § 62.

necessary result of the antagonism of opposing forces. Both these principles are shown to hold good throughout the whole range of phenomena, from the physical and chemical to the psychical and social. These truths, then, are "philosophical" truths—they have that character of universality which constitutes them parts of philosophy, properly so-called. "They are truths which unify concrete phenomena belonging to all divisions of nature, and so must be components of that complete coherent conception of things which philosophy seeks."<sup>1</sup> But none the less they are truths of the analytical order, and "no number of analytical truths will make up that synthesis of thought which alone can be an interpretation of the synthesis of things."<sup>2</sup> The problem now before us will be set in a clearer light if we remember the relation, already noted, between the partially unified knowledge which we call science and the completely unified knowledge which is the aim of philosophy. The various sciences advance from the resolution of their phenomena into the action of certain factors to the larger question: How from such combined actions result the given phenomena in all their complexity? They thus arrive at special syntheses. But such syntheses, up to the most general, are more or less independent of one another; the syntheses of biology, for example, remain within the domain of biology, the syntheses of psychology within that of psychology. The business of philosophy is now to establish a universal synthesis, comprehending and consolidating such special syntheses.

"Having seen that matter is indestructible, motion continuous, and force persistent—having seen that forces are everywhere undergoing transformation, and that motion, always following a line of least resistance, is invariably rhythmic, it remains to discover of similarly invariable formulae express the combined consequences of the which thus separately formulated."<sup>1</sup> is the

It is from this fresh point of departure that Spencer proceeds to reduce to systematic and comprehensive expressions laws of that continuous redistributed of matter and motion which is going on throughout the universe in general, and in detail. All sensible existence are the aggregates which they form and is their history, and this history covers the entire period between their emergence from the imperceptible and their disappearance again into the imperceptible. The redistribution of matter and motion which brings about the passage from the imperceptible to the various stages of the sensible state, and back into the imperceptible, merely comprises two antagonistic processes, not characterised by the integrative, technical and the dissipation of motion, but by the absorption of motion, and the disintegration of matter. In the next produces consolidation and in the latter, diffusion and disintegration. These two universal processes are evolution and consolidation. The entire universe is in a state of continual change, and it is the experience. It processes that all change to follow small, inorganic, organic, the long and psychical, social, have, in this ultimate. This brings us face to face with the whole question of compatibility with

<sup>1</sup> *First Principles*, § 89.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, § 90.

<sup>1</sup> *First Principles*, § 37.



formation of things, and of the ultimate uniformities which that transformation reveals. Our next business will be to understand what we mean by evolution.

## IV.

What, then, is evolution?

A broad answer has already been given to this question. As dissolution is disintegration, so evolution is integration. This definition takes note only of the primary element in the evolutionary process. While evolution must always involve an integration of matter and constant dissipation of motion, or, in other words, an increase in definiteness of coherence, it will commonly imply more than this. We must, therefore, examine the secondary changes by which this primary change is habitually effected before our theory of evolution can be complete. Indeed, these changes are so much the conspicuous characteristics of the evolutionary process that, as we shall see, these that Spencer himself postulates, and with these that he remained while pre-occupied. Our best way will be to follow him rapidly through the line of thought by which his resulting segregation of the law of evolution into those reached. Points otherwise These are points which will be robbed of much of their sense asserts, and a good deal of substance for granted. The physician has even said that Spencer's earliest ing; and from the time of a humanitarian proceed to the adoption of his way of approach pose as above set, the general evolution lay.

Pushing the argument to its logical phase of development, we call progress. The force, the indestructible, had been handed down from the nineteenth

\* *First Principles*  
 \* *Ibid.*, spite the absurdities

and extravagances that had long vitiated it—despite the vagueness and the crudity that it bore with it as an hereditary taint, the kernel of vital truth which it enfolded rendered it a fertile contribution to thought. Spencer's earliest writings are dominated by this idea of individual and social advance; but it was altogether foreign to his intellectual character to interest himself in the working out of a conception that was not at bottom susceptible of definite interpretation. It is all very well to talk about progress; but what *is* progress? This was the special form of the question to which for a number of years he was gradually feeling his way to an answer.

Already in *Social Statics* he had reached what then seemed to him an adequate reply. Asserting the necessity of progress (here metaphysically associated with a pre-ordained order),<sup>1</sup> he borrows from Coleridge the theory which Coleridge in turn had derived from German speculation, that life is "a tendency towards individuation." It is in the fulfilment of this tendency, says Spencer, that all progress will be found to consist. Throughout the whole animate world we discover it at work in the production of higher and higher forms of organisation and structure, and in man its fullest manifestation is reached. "By virtue of his complexity of structure he is furthest removed from the inorganic world in which there is least individuality. Again, his intelligence and adaptability commonly enable him to maintain life to old age—to

<sup>1</sup> This is one of the many points at which this remarkable book presents itself as a connecting link between eighteenth-century theories of progress, with their express or implicit teleology, and the purely naturalistic interpretation of Spencer's later work.

complete the cycle of his existence ; that is, to fill out the limits of this individuality to the full. Again, he is self-conscious ; that is, he recognises his own individuality. And.....even the change observable in human affairs is still towards a greater development of individuality—may still be described as ‘a tendency to individuation.’”<sup>1</sup>

Translated into more philosophical language, this tendency to individuation is found to embrace two closely inter-related processes. Obviously, increasing complexity is one of these; not so obviously, this increase of complexity must have increase of unity as its natural accompaniment. Universal specialisation, with its resulting advance in heterogeneity, is only possible if, while all things are becoming more and more characteristically marked off from one another, they are at the same time becoming gradually more and more interdependent. The line of growth is “at once towards complete separateness and complete union.”<sup>2</sup> Differentiation without concomitant unification would lead to chaos and confusion ; differentiation along with concomitant unification produces that enlargement of the organic harmony which we call progress.

This double aspect of the matter is clearly recognised in *Social Statics*,<sup>3</sup> and was never entirely lost sight of in Spencer’s subsequent speculations.<sup>4</sup> Yet, as was not unnatural, it was the more striking and conspicuous element in progress that for some time alone absorbed his attention. Allowing the

doctrine of unification to drop practically out of his thought, he fixed his mind upon the factor of increasing differentiation, which, detached from all other considerations, he attempted, in the essay on *Progress : Its Law and Cause*, to expand into a complete theory of universal development.

In this course he was materially assisted by German speculations on the evolution of the individual organism.<sup>5</sup> “The investigations of Wolff, Goethe, and Von Baer,” he writes in the early part of the just-named article, “have established the truth that the series of changes gone through during the development of a seed into a tree, or an ovum into an animal, constitute an advance from homogeneity of structure to heterogeneity of structure. In its primary stage every germ consists of a substance that is uniform throughout, both in texture and chemical composition. The first step is the appearance of a difference between two parts of this substance ; or, as the phenomenon is called in physiological language, a differentiation.....By endless such differentiations there is finally produced that complex combination of tissues and organs constituting the adult animal or plant. This is the history of all organisms whatever. It is settled beyond dispute that organic progress consists in a change from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous. Now, we propose.....to show that this law of organic progress is the law of all progress.....From the earliest traceable cosmical changes down to the latest results of civilisation, we shall find that the transformation of the homogeneous

<sup>1</sup> *Social Statics*, chap. xxx., § 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. xxx., § 13.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. xxx., §§ 13, 14.

<sup>4</sup> In the essays on the *Philosophy of Style* and the *Genesis of Science*, for example, the doctrine of increasing unification is clearly stated.

<sup>5</sup> These he became acquainted with in 1852—that is, after the publication of *Social Statics*. See *First Principles*, § 119, note.

into the heterogeneous is that in which progress essentially consists."

A full half of the essay in question is devoted to an inductive establishment of this thesis; the other half being taken up with the affiliation of this universal process upon the law of the multiplication of effects, to which we shall come directly. The statement set forth, therefore, is that evolution consists wholly in increase of complexity—is a change from a condition of homogeneity to a condition of heterogeneity, brought about by ever-increasing differentiations. So certain had Spencer now become that this was not only *a* law of evolution, but *the* law of evolution, that he incorporated the formula in the first edition of his *First Principles*.<sup>1</sup>

Further thought, however, led him to see that this was an imperfect view of the case. An important truth, of which he had just caught a glimpse in *Social Statics*, had now to be reinstated in his plan. The mere change in the direction of increasing heterogeneity or complexity could not, as he came presently to realise, be held to constitute evolution, since there are many such changes which make, not for evolution, but for destruction. An injury to an organism renders that organism more multiform in its composition; a cancer in the system produces marked increase in heterogeneity; a revolution in the social state makes the state far less homogeneous;

<sup>1</sup> "In that essay [on Progress]..... as also in the first edition of this work, I fell into the error of supposing that the transformation of the homogeneous into the heterogeneous constitutes evolution; whereas.....it constitutes the secondary redistribution accompanying the primary redistribution in that evolution which we distinguish as compound—or rather.....it constitutes the most conspicuous part of this secondary redistribution" (*First Principles*, § 119, note).

but we look upon none of these changes as changes in the line of progress or evolution. On the contrary, we see at once that they tend in the opposite direction—in the direction of dissolution; for, let them go on long enough and far enough, and dissolution will be the inevitable result. It is clear, then, that we must seek for another law to condition this of progressive differentiation. When is it that the transformation from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous means evolution, and when is it that it means the reverse? The answer to this question will be found in a return to our half-realised but now partly-forgotten principle of unification. Add this to the previously-enunciated doctrine of increasing heterogeneity, and the complete formula is reached. The differentiation of an organism into many specialised parts is one requirement of the developmental process; the other requirement is seen to be fulfilled when, and only when, these various specialised parts become more and more interdependent. Along with advance towards increasing heterogeneity there must also be an advance towards completer organic unity. Apply this new statement of the law to the cases above referred to, and it will be seen immediately that the want before felt is now made good. A cancer in the system, a revolution in the state, while they increase the complexity, break up or jeopardise the unity, of organisation. Evolution, therefore, as we have before said, is always integration, as dissolution is disintegration.

Thus we have followed Spencer to the establishment of his world-famous formula of evolution in its completed shape. Abstract and concise as it is in statement, it will now be found to present no insuperable difficulty, for we have



reached it by a route that has made each part of it separately clear. Evolution, then, is to be defined as *a continuous change from indefinite incoherent homogeneity to definite coherent heterogeneity of structure and function, through successive differentiations and integrations.*<sup>1</sup>

The world at large has a horror of abstract statements, and there is in the air a vague, but none the less influential, belief that because long and unfamiliar words are often used to disguise paucity of thought, paucity of thought must always be predicated where they are employed. It is not surprising, therefore, that many people are more inclined to ridicule this formula than to attempt to understand it; it is surprising only when we find men of philosophic cultivation following the same vulgar course. Professor Goldwin Smith it was, I believe, who years ago remarked that the universe must have heaved a sigh of relief when this explanation of her processes was given to an astonished world through the cerebration of a distinguished thinker. Perhaps we may be allowed to smile at the epigram without losing one particle of our faith in the doctrine which it is sometimes supposed to bring into disrepute. But of

all the efforts hitherto made to meet a great principle with the weapons of verbal wit, that of Mr. Kirkman, the well-known mathematician, holds an easy supremacy. Taking the formula as it stood in the edition of *First Principles* of 1862—the statement there given differing slightly from that adopted later—he undertakes to translate it “into plain English,” and the following jargon of uncouth phraseology is the result: “Evolution is a change from a nohowish, untalkaboutable, all-alikeness to a somehowish and in-general talkaboutable, not-all-alikeness, by continuous something-elsefications and sticktogetherations.” For myself, I can only say that I regret that Spencer ever saw fit to take this amusing exhibition of intellectual gymnastics seriously, as he did in the appendix to the fourth edition of *First Principles*. As a joke it is well enough; but a man who knows so little about the needs of language that he puts it forth in place of argument, and appears to think that he has thereby made short work of the principle that the formula embodies, is surely not worth powder and shot. Provided that Mr. Kirkman’s translation is absolutely accurate (which in one or two points may be taken as doubtful), and provided, further, that the English compounds which he offers in place of the Greek and Latin equivalents can be made to bear the same high degree of generality that the original words convey, then all that it is necessary to say is that the principle remains just as true in the one form of statement as in the other. Let Mr. Kirkman call heterogeneity “somethingelsefication,” and integration “sticktogetheration,” if it pleases him best to do so; it none the less remains a fact that the double change towards diversity in unity is that in

<sup>1</sup> In a purely introductory volume like the present, I have thought it best to give this definition in the simplest form compatible with complete statement. In its most fully developed shape it runs: Evolution is an integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion; during which the matter passes from an indefinite incoherent homogeneity to a definite coherent heterogeneity; and during which the retained motion undergoes a parallel transformation (*First Principles*, § 145). Practically speaking, what we mainly have to keep in mind is that evolution is a double-sided process—multiformity in unity, or specialisation along with mutual dependence.

which all evolution will be found to consist. Translate the whole formula into Hottentot or Cherokee if you like; the truth for which it stands will not be made a whit less true.

# V.

But with the formulation of this all-pervading process we reach only the starting-point of a fresh investigation. Philosophy—the complete unification of knowledge—demands the re-statement of the law of evolution in deductive form. Such being the transformation exhibited by all classes of concrete phenomena, we have to ask: Why this continuous metamorphosis? We have formulated the ultimate uniformities of that metamorphosis—the laws to which, as we symbolically say, it everywhere conforms. We must now seek the *rationale* of the universal changes inductively set forth—must undertake to interpret them as *necessary* consequences of some deeper law, in the same way as Kepler's empirical generalisations may be interpreted as necessary consequences of the law of gravitation.

In thus undertaking to present the phenomena of evolution in synthetic order, Spencer starts from the law of the instability of the homogeneous, itself a corollary from the persistence of force. The condition of homogeneity is a condition of unstable equilibrium, because in any finite homogeneous aggregate the different parts are unequally exposed to incident forces. Moreover, "every mass or part of a mass, on which a force falls, subdivides, and differentiates that force, which thereupon proceeds to work a variety of changes"; and while every cause thus produces more than one effect, with the result that complexity continually increases, and with con-

tinually-increasing rapidity, the process of segregation, "tending ever to subdivide unlike units and to bring together like units," serves at the same time "to sharpen or make definite differentiations otherwise caused." Thus we have three comprehensive laws—the instability of the homogeneous, the multiplication of effects, and segregation—by which to account for the continual changes which we call evolution; we now see not only that these universal changes do take place, but also why they must take place. Nor is this all. These three laws are in turn exhibited as deductions from the deepest of all truths—as inevitable results of the persistence of force under the forms of matter and motion. In this way the circle of induction and deduction is made complete.

While the foregoing outline has had for its main purpose the exposition of the fundamental principles of the *Synthetic Philosophy*, it should also have helped, as we anticipated that it would, to make clear the method pursued by Spencer in the working out of his system. But as this is a point upon which we cannot well be too explicit, I shall complete this survey by following his own account (given to me in a letter after the publication of the first edition of this little book) of the course of thought by which he was led to the formulation of the ideas above summarised. This will, indeed, involve some little repetition, but not enough, considering the somewhat abstruse nature of the subject, to give cause for regret.

The simple nucleus of his philosophic system, he told me, first made its appearance in *Social Statics*, where, in the chapter entitled "General Considerations," mention is made of the biological truth that low types of animals are

relatively homogeneous—are composed of many like parts not mutually dependent ; while higher animals are relatively heterogeneous—are composed of parts that are unlike and are mutually dependent. This, he wrote, “was an induction which I had reached in the course of biological studies—mainly, I fancy, while attending Professor Owen’s lectures on the vertebrate skeleton.” With this was joined the statement that the same is true of societies, “which begin with many like parts not mutually dependent, and end with many unlike parts that are mutually dependent.” This, again, was an induction. “And then in the joining of these came the induction that the individual organism and the social organism followed this law.” Thus the radical conception of the entire system took shape before Spencer became acquainted with Von Baer’s law, which, as we have seen, did not occur till two years later. Yet this law, though applying to the unfolding of the individual organism only, had its use. In furnishing the expression, “from homogeneity to heterogeneity,” it presented a convenient intellectual implement, for, “by its brevity and its applicability to all orders of phenomena, it served for thinking much better than the preceding generalisation, which contained the same essential thought.” The essays which followed *Social Statics* were marked by the establishment of various separate inductions, in which other groups of phenomena were brought under this large principle ; while in the first edition of the *Psychology* not only was this principle shown to comprehend mental phenomena, but there was also recognised the primary law of evolution—integration and increase in definiteness. What followed may best be given in Spencer’s own words :—

Then it was that there suddenly arose in me the conception that the law which I had separately recognised in various groups of phenomena was a universal law applying to the whole cosmos : the many small inductions were merged in the large induction. And only after this largest induction had been formed did there arise the question—Why? Only then did I see that the universal cause for the universal transformations was the multiplication of effects, and that they might be deduced from the law of the multiplication of effects. The same thing happened at later stages. The generalisation which immediately preceded the publication of the essay on *Progress : Its Law and Cause*—the instability of the homogeneous—was also an induction. So was the direction of motion and the rhythm of motion. Then, having arrived at these derivative causes of the universal transformation, it presently dawned upon me (in consequence of the recent promulgation of the doctrine of the conservation of force) that all these derivative causes were sequences from that universal cause. The question had, I believe, arisen—Why these several derivative laws? and that came as an answer. Only then did there arise the idea of developing the whole of the universal transformation from the persistence of force. So you see that the process began by being inductive, and ended by being deductive ; and this is the peculiarity of the method followed. On the one hand, I was never content with any truth remaining in the inductive form. On the other hand, I was never content with allowing a deductive interpretation to go unverified by reference to the facts.

The body of philosophy wrought by this two-fold method into a firmly-knit logical whole may thus be described as a science of the sciences, and is properly called Synthetic.\*

## VI.

One supremely important point must here be noted, to prevent possible misapprehensions.

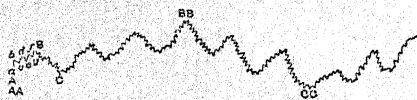
It is a common error to suppose that

\* The work was originally announced simply as *A System of Philosophy*. The distinctive title was adopted in 1867.



evolution is continuous and uninterrupted—that its course may be symbolised by a straight line. A wavy line would, roughly speaking, be its more correct expression. An immediate corollary from Spencer's first principle of the persistence of force is, as we have seen, the law of the rhythm of motion. Were there only a single body in space, a single force would impel that body at a uniform rate to all eternity along an undeviating course; but in that case no variety would ever arise, and no evolution would be possible. As it is, the processes of evolution and dissolution are continually in conflict, locally and generally; and since throughout the whole universe motion is rhythmical or undulatory, evolution necessarily implies dissolution. This is true of all phenomena, from the minutest changes cognisable by science to the latest transformation of societies studied by the economist and the historian.\*

\* Diagrammatically, making allowance for the rhythm of all motion and the consequent alternation of evolution and dissolution (progress and retrogression), the history of the universe in general and detail may be approximately presented in this way:—



it being understood that, while each of the smallest lines is supposed itself to be made up of undulations and so on in a diminishing scale, the whole diagram as here given is likewise only a limb of a larger rhythm, and this again of a still larger rhythm, *ad infinitum*. In other words, as the minute undulations, *a, b, c, d, e, f, g*, etc., are components of the larger undulations *A, B, C*, etc., and these again of the still larger undulations *AA, BB, CC*, etc., these still larger undulations *AA, BB, CC*, themselves go to make up vaster sweeps of rhythm, and so forth, to any

extent. Evolution, then, as we have always to bear in mind, does not sum up the entire history of the universe, but only its ascending history. All existence passes through a cycle of change, and sooner or later dissolution asserts itself to undo the work that evolution has done. Individuals die, organisms disintegrate, societies collapse, races and civilisations are extinguished; and in the life and death of a gnat we thus find a tiny symbol of the pulsations that produce the birth and decay of worlds. Thus we have throughout to recognise the ascending and the descending scale, and to understand that the one is the necessary complement of the other. The flood of new light that this consideration lets in upon the problems of psychology and sociology is only now just beginning to be appreciated;† but the mind staggers before its

extent. All this reminds us of De Morgan's verses:—

“Great fleas have little fleas upon their backs  
to bite ’em,  
And little fleas have lesser fleas, and so *ad  
infinitum*;  
And the great fleas themselves, in turn, have  
greater fleas to go on,  
And these again have greater still, and greater  
still, and so on.”

† The law of rhythm, when once fully recognised by the student of human affairs, will introduce important changes into the philosophy of history. In other practical directions its influence promises to be at least as significant. Dealing with various illustrations of it, as furnished by individual and social life, Spencer wrote: “Nor are there wanting evidences of mental undulations greater in length than any of these [which he had just been considering]—undulations which take weeks, or months, or years, to complete themselves. We continually hear of moods which recur at intervals. Very many persons have their epochs of vivacity and depression. There are periods of industry following periods of idleness, and times at which particular subjects or tastes are cultivated with zeal,

larger possible implications. If the doctrine of rhythm—of the alternation of evolution and dissolution—holds good of every detail of the universe, it must hold good no less of the universe taken as a whole. We pause a moment upon the conception of eternal change—eternal in the past, eternal in the future—to which this doctrine unavoidably leads. “Apparently the universally-coexistent forces of attraction and repulsion, which, as we have seen, necessitate rhythm in all minor changes throughout the universe, also necessitate rhythm in the totality of its changes—produce now an immeasurable period during which the attractive forces, predominating, cause universal concentration, and then an immeasurable period during which

alternating with times at which they are neglected. Respecting which slow oscillations, the only qualification to be made is that, being affected by numerous influences, they are comparatively irregular” (*First Principles*, § 86). The following striking passage from Dr. O. W. Holmes’s *Over the Teacups* (chap. viii.) reads almost like a commentary upon the one just given: “I think if patients and physicians were in the habit of recognising the fact I am going to mention, both would be gainers. . . . It is a mistake to suppose that the normal course of health is represented by a straight horizontal line. Independently of the well-known causes which raise or depress the standard of vitality, there seems to be—I think I may venture to say there is—a rhythmic undulation in the flow of the vital force. The ‘dynamo’ which furnishes the working powers of consciousness and action has its annual, its monthly, its diurnal waves—even its momentary ripples—in the current it furnishes. There are greater and lesser curves in the movement of every day’s life—a series of ascending and descending movements; a periodicity depending on the very nature of the force at work in the living organism. Thus we have our good seasons and our bad seasons, our good days and our bad days, life climbing and descending in long or short undulations, which I have called the curve of health.”

the repulsive forces, predominating, cause universal diffusion—alternate eras of evolution and dissolution. And thus there is suggested the conception of a past during which there have been successive evolutions analogous to that which is now going on; and a future during which successive other such evolutions may go on—ever the same in principle, but never the same in concrete result.”<sup>1</sup>

## VII.

We may supplement this brief survey of some of the main doctrines of *First Principles* by the following summary of his philosophy which Spencer himself drew up a number of years ago for publication in Appleton’s *American Cyclopædia*, and which is here reproduced from that work:—

1. Throughout the universe, in general and in detail, there is an unceasing redistribution of matter and motion.

2. This redistribution constitutes evolution where there is a predominant integration of matter and dissipation of motion, and constitutes dissolution where there is a predominant absorption of motion and disintegration of matter.

3. Evolution is simple when the process of integration, or the formation of a coherent aggregate, proceeds uncomplicated by other processes.

4. Evolution is compound when along with this primary change from an incoherent to a coherent state there go on secondary changes, due to differences in the circumstances of the different parts of the aggregate.

5. These secondary changes constitute a transformation of the homogeneous into the heterogeneous—a transformation which, like the first, is exhibited in the universe as a whole and in all (or nearly all) its details—in the aggregate of stars and nebulae; in the planetary system; in the earth as an inorganic mass; in each organism, vegetal or animal (Von Baer’s law); in the aggregate of organisms throughout geologic

<sup>1</sup> *First Principles*, § 183.

time ; in the mind ; in society ; in all products of social activity.

6. The process of integration, acting locally as well as generally, combines with the process of differentiation to render this change, not simply from homogeneity to heterogeneity, but from an indefinite homogeneity to a definite heterogeneity ; and this trait of increasing definiteness, which accompanies the trait of increasing heterogeneity, is, like it, exhibited in the totality of things, and in all its divisions and subdivisions down to the minutest.

7. Along with this redistribution of the matter composing any evolving aggregate there goes on a redistribution of the retained motion of its components in relation to one another ; this also becomes, step by step, more definitely heterogeneous.

8. In the absence of a homogeneity that is infinite and absolute, this redistribution, of which evolution is one phase, is inevitable. The causes which necessitate it are :

9. The instability of the homogeneous, which is consequent upon the different exposures of the different parts of any limited aggregate to incident forces. The transformations hence resulting are complicated by—

10. The multiplication of effects : every mass and part of a mass on which a force falls subdivides and differentiates that force, which thereupon proceeds to work a variety of changes ; and each of these becomes the parent of similarly multiplying changes : the multiplication of these becoming greater in proportion as the aggregate becomes more heterogeneous. And these two causes of increasing differentiations are furthered by—

11. Segregation, which is a process tending ever to separate unlike units, and to bring together like units, so serving continually to sharpen or make definite differentiations otherwise caused.

12. Equilibration is the final result of these transformations which an evolving aggregate undergoes. The changes go on until there is reached an equilibrium between the forces which all parts of the aggregate are exposed to, and the forces these parts oppose to them. Equilibration may pass through a transition stage of balanced motions (as in a planetary system), or of balanced functions (as in a living body), on the way to ultimate equilibrium ; but the state of rest in inorganic bodies, or death in organic bodies, is the necessary limit of the changes constituting evolution.

13. Dissolution is the counterchange which sooner or later every evolved aggregate undergoes. Remaining exposed to surrounding forces that are unequilibrated, each aggregate is ever liable to be dissipated by the increase, gradual or sudden, of its contained motion ; and its dissipation, quickly undergone by bodies lately animate, and slowly undergone by inanimate masses, remains to be undergone at an indefinitely remote period by each planetary and stellar mass, which, since an indefinitely remote period in the past, has been slowly evolving : the cycle of its transformations being thus completed.

14. This rhythm of evolution and dissolution, completing itself during short periods in small aggregates, and in the vast aggregates distributed through space completing itself in periods which are immeasurable by human thought, is, so far as we can see, universal and eternal : each alternating phase of the process predominating—now in this region of space, and now in that—as local conditions determine.

15. All these phenomena, from their great features down to their minutest details, are necessary results of the persistence of force under its forms of matter and motion. Given these in their known distributions through space, and their quantities being unchangeable, either by increase or decrease, there inevitably result the continuous redistributions distinguishable as evolution and dissolution, as well as all those special traits above enumerated.

16. That which persists, unchanging in quantity, but ever-changing in form, under these sensible appearances which the universe presents to us, transcends human knowledge and conception ; is an unknown and an unknowable power, which we are obliged to recognise as without limit in space, and without beginning or end in time.

## VIII.

The whole body of philosophy, or completely-unified knowledge, Spencer divides into two parts : “On the one hand, the things contemplated may be the universal truths : all particular truths referred to being used simply for proof or elucidation of these universal truths.



On the other hand, setting out with the universal truths as granted, the things contemplated may be the particular truths as interpreted by them. In both cases we deal with the universal truths; but in the one case they are passive, and in the other case active—in the one case they form the products of exploration, and in the other case the instruments of exploration. These divisions we may appropriately call General Philosophy and Special Philosophy respectively.\* General Philosophy forms the subject-matter of *First Principles*; the remaining nine volumes of the Synthetic series are devoted to the task of applying the universal truths there formulated to the particular phenomena of Biology, Psychology, Sociology, and Ethics.

Some of the most striking features of Spencer's treatment of the two last-named subjects will be dealt with in the following chapters—their more obviously practical bearings justifying this special consideration. The rest of the present chapter will be devoted to the earlier portions of the work.

The aim of the *Principles of Biology* was, as Spencer himself stated in the preface, "to set forth the general truths of biology as illustrative of and as interpreted by the laws of evolution." Due notice must be taken of the phrase—"the general truths of biology." To write an exhaustive treatise on the subject was no part of Spencer's plan, which called only for such a co-ordination and synthesis of fundamental principles as, expressed in terms of the universal laws of evolution, and finally affiliated upon the ultimate truth, would present in broadest outline the science of life. Students of these two volumes

have also need to bear in mind that they were published at a time when the whole question of evolution was still under fierce discussion, and when even the scientific world itself was divided into hostile camps over every issue involved. Hence the special historic significance, over and above the general philosophic significance, of Part III., setting forth the arguments in favour of the development-hypothesis, and dealing with the factors of organic evolution. Beyond this, little needs to be said by way of introduction to the work. Attention may, however, be directed to the law of equilibration, and some of its more significant bearings.†

Life being defined as "the continuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations," Spencer proceeds to show that the degree of life varies as the correspondence varies between organism and environment; the highest point being reached where the correspondence exhibits a maximum of complexity, rapidity, and length of maintenance. Lack of correspondence—that is, inability on the part of an organism to balance external actions by internal actions, or, in other words, to meet the demands of the environment at every point—means death; absolutely perfect adjustment, on the other hand, would be absolutely perfect life. Observe, then, that equilibration, biologically considered, expresses the tendency on the

\* The general law is worked out in full in *First Principles*, Part II., chap. xxii. The question is there raised—Can the changes constituting evolution go on without limit? And the answer is, No. "The changes go on until there is reached an equilibrium between the forces which all parts of the aggregate are exposed to, and the forces these parts oppose to them." Hence, in all cases, "there is a progress toward equilibrium."

† *First Principles*, § 38.

part of an organism to adjust itself more and more completely to an environment which, it must be remembered, is itself in a state of perpetual change. Now, such equilibration may be direct or indirect. It is direct when the organism responds immediately to the demands of its surroundings. It is indirect where variations which are in the line of greater correspondence are gathered up, because they favour continuance of life, and transmitted to following generations. When these statements are looked at closely, a very interesting fact comes to light. While investigating the law of equilibration, we have at the same time been formulating the factors of organic evolution. For, clearly, the doctrine of direct equilibration is the doctrine, specially associated with the name of Lamarck, that changes in structure are brought about by those changes in function which are produced by the conditions of life; while the doctrine of indirect equilibration is simply Darwin's great doctrine of natural selection, or the survival of the fittest in the struggle for existence.

Nor is this all. By virtue of the light which the law of equilibration throws upon the vexed question of population, and, therefore, in turn, upon the whole problem of the future of the human race, it has also an immediate practical interest.

This problem, with its intimate connection with the facts of animal fertility, began seriously to engage the attention of thinkers towards the close of the eighteenth century. One remarkable outgrowth of the generous ardour and enthusiasm which accompanied the earlier developments of the French Revolution was the strong belief in human perfectibility which suddenly took pos-

session of some of the finest minds of the age. It seemed only necessary to throw off the numerous political and social shackles of the past, to get rid of the tyrannies of kingcraft and priestcraft and aristocracies, and to break the fetters of degrading forms and customs that had been handed down from the past; it seemed only necessary, in a word, to give men and women free play, and the brightest dreams of poet and seer would turn forthwith into still brighter realities. Something of the intense thrill of this great new hope we can catch in the earlier books of Wordsworth's *Prelude*; as in the later books we come into immediate touch with that numbing sense of disappointment and despair which settled down over the consciousness of the world when it was realised that France had indeed failed to make good the magnificent promises of 1789. We know how that practical failure brought the whole doctrine of human progress for a time into disrepute: such a work as Chateaubriand's *Essai sur les Révolutions Anciennes et Modernes* being simply one indication of a widespread reaction in thought. Meanwhile, expressive as it may now well seem to us to be of this sad change from sanguine expectation to doubt and despondency, appeared in 1798 the first edition of one of the world's epoch-making books—Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population*.<sup>1</sup> The central doctrine of

<sup>1</sup> "There is nothing new but what has been forgotten," says a clever French paradox. For the sake of those interested in what Buckle called the "paternity of ideas," it may be pointed out that, original as the work of Malthus seemed to be, he was not without predecessors in his own chosen field. One Townsend, in an account of a journey through Spain, had already broached the problem of the relation of human population to the means of support; and even

that book—the work, strangely enough, of an English clergyman of the Established Church—struck a deadly blow at the gorgeous speculations of humanitarian dreamers. The earthly Eden which men had declared to be at hand was now pronounced an impossibility. For Malthus showed conclusively, as it seemed to himself and to many others of his and later times, that the world is and always must be over-populated, and that the pressure of humanity upon the means of subsistence is not an accident, but a necessity. If, therefore, it is inevitable that human beings should increase much more rapidly than their sustenance, misery in one form or the other is a necessary accompaniment of human life; and wholesale death by mere starvation is only prevented by the operation of other factors which have hitherto combined to prevent population from running too far in advance of its material of support. Let progressive civilisation interfere with these factors, as it constantly tends to do—let it decrease wars, plagues, excessive and premature mortality, vices of various kinds, and enforced or voluntary celibacy—and upon the removal of these hitherto stringent preventive checks a universal battle for life would ensue. Hence it is useless to indulge in lyric enthusiasms about the reign of plenty and the kingdom of peace and love upon earth. The reign of plenty is a myth, the kingdom of peace and love an airy fiction. To all such gorgeous visions a death-blow was given by the revelation of an ever-

he had a precursor in that great writer who foreshadowed so many peculiarly modern ideas—Voltaire. (See the article "Population" in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique*.) The subject had also been touched by Hume and Benjamin Franklin.

lasting and inevitable want of balance between human population and its means of support.<sup>1</sup>

Malthus's book came upon the world with the blight of disillusion. Its conclusions were widely accepted; its theories passed into the economist's recognised body of thought; the optimism which had characterised eighteenth-century thought was at an end.<sup>2</sup>

Remembering this, we are in a position to appreciate the importance of Spencer's own contribution to the subject. A profound investigation of the whole question of multiplication, asexual and sexual, sub-human and human, leads him to the conclusion, established as usual inductively and deductively, that, while excess of fertility has been and continues to be the cause of evolution, every fresh step in that evolution itself necessitates, in its turn, a decline in fertility. That human population will forever continue to press upon the means of human subsistence, as Malthus supposed, is therefore not a

<sup>1</sup> How pregnant were Malthus's speculations is shown by the fact that it is in this essay of his that we find the starting-point of Darwin's own development of thought—the development which presently culminated in the *Origin of Species*. Given this universal over-population, and it is clear that wholesale destruction must be all the time at work. As animals and plants are thus perpetually tending to increase faster than their means of sustenance, a struggle among them must result; and in this struggle those individuals of every species are likely to conquer and survive which are equipped for the conflict by even the most minute variations favouring them in gaining food and avoiding enemies. (See Darwin's own introduction to the sixth edition of the *Origin of Species*.)

<sup>2</sup> It must not be forgotten that the *Essay* was inspired by Godwin's writings, and was thus immediately directed against the current Utopianism. For its effect on the feeling of the time, see the Preface to Shelley's anti-reactionary poem, *The Revolt of Islam*.



fact. Individuation and reproduction are in necessary antagonism ; advance in the former must be followed by decrease in the latter ; and a gradual approach will thus be made towards an equilibrium "between the number of new individuals produced and the number which survive and propagate."<sup>1</sup> Fecundity is thus not a permanent factor, as is implied in the Malthusian view ; and pressure of population and its accompanying evils, instead of remaining the one problem to be encountered all along the line of human progress, must gradually work itself out altogether :—

The excess of fertility has itself rendered the process of civilisation inevitable ; and the process of civilisation must inevitably diminish fertility, and at last destroy its excess. From the beginning pressure of population has been the proximate cause of progress. It produced the original diffusion of the race. It compelled men to abandon predatory habits and take to agriculture. It led to the clearing of the earth's surface. It forced men into the social state ; made social organisation inevitable ; and has developed the social sentiments. It has stimulated to progressive improvements in production and to increased skill and intelligence. It is daily thrusting us into closer contact and more mutually dependent relationships. And, after having caused, as it ultimately must, the due peopling of the globe, and the raising of all its habitable parts into the highest state of culture—after having brought all processes for the satisfaction of human wants to perfection—after having, at the same time, developed the intellect into complete competency for its work, and the feelings into complete fitness for social life—after having done all this, the pressure of population, as it gradually finishes its work, must gradually bring itself to an end.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the curse pronounced by Malthus is stripped of its terror, and a way of return is opened to the older faith in the progress of mankind. And

it may be noted in passing that this faculty for discovering the soul of goodness in things which, superficially viewed, seem entirely evil is highly characteristic of Spencer's whole course of thought. The doctrine of evolution—so depressing to many, and, within recent years, so often used as the basis of a pessimistic philosophy—is by him habitually interpreted upon the optimistic side. By its aid, again and again, in Emerson's picturesque phrase, he has converted "the Furies into Muses and the hells into benefit."

## IX.

Many competent critics have regarded the *Principles of Psychology* as Spencer's greatest achievement, and not, perhaps, without good cause. Nowhere else, certainly, could we find a more striking exhibition of his magnificent powers of both analysis and synthesis, of his clear perception of the significance of the minutest details, of his daring sweep of generalisation and deduction, of his firm control over the longest and most intricate chains of reasoning. To the phenomena of no other subject, it may be added, have evolutionary principles been applied with more conspicuous results.

The old psychology had been purely statical. Its subject-matter had been the manifestations of intelligence in the modern civilised adult ; and a hard-and-fast line had been drawn between these and all the manifestations of intelligence exhibited by the subhuman world. Mind in man was held to differ absolutely and generically from mind in animals ; and no study of the latter could be resorted to in the hope of throwing light upon the problems of the former. The foolish antithesis of instinct and reason is a sturdy survival of this old thought.

<sup>1</sup> *Principles of Biology*, § 377. <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, § 376.

This traditional course, followed unquestioningly from generation to generation, and by school after school of metaphysicians, had naturally carried the subject of psychology but little beyond the point reached by the fantastic speculations of mediæval scholasticism. Evolution offered the student an entirely new standpoint. Its great principle of the continuity of all phenomena, applied to the problems of intelligence, showed that all absolute distinctions, here as elsewhere, are mere subjective illusions. Between mind in its highest development and mind in its first dim awakenings no boundary can anywhere be set; and the complex intellect of the modern adult, so far from being treated as a thing unique and apart, has thus henceforth to be regarded as the production of the compounding and recompounding of simpler and still simpler elements. Mind is to be understood only in the light of its evolution.

As in the *Principles of Biology*, then, the general truths of life were interpreted through the fundamental laws of evolution, so in the *Principles of Psychology* the facts and problems of mind are elucidated in the same way. Given the nervous shock,<sup>1</sup> which Spencer distin-

guishes as the primordial and unresolvable element, or ultimate unit, of consciousness, the business of scientific psychology is to follow the process of progressive integration and differentiation, step by step, from reflex action, through sensation, instinct, memory, reason, the feelings, and the will, relating their progressive changes at every point with corresponding changes in the nervous system. But more than this: the principle of continuity further warns us against any attempt to fix a barrier between physiological and psychological phenomena. The manifestations of physical and mental activity have also their unity of composition, for the life of the body and mental life are species, of which life, properly so called, is the genus.

Though we commonly regard mental and bodily life as distinct, it needs only to ascend somewhat above the ordinary point of view to see that they are but subdivisions of life in general, and that no line of demarcation can be drawn between them otherwise than arbitrarily. Doubtless, to those who persist after the popular fashion in contemplating only the extreme forms of the two, this assertion will appear as incredible as the assertion that a tree arises by imperceptible changes out of a seed, would appear to one who had seen none of the intermediate stages.....[But] it is not more certain that, from the simple reflex action by which the infant sucks, up to the elaborate reasoning of the adult man, the progress is by daily infinitesimal steps, than it is certain that between the automatic actions of the lowest creatures and the

<sup>1</sup> Such is the word employed by Spencer, but he strictly means *psychical* shock. Anxious as he was throughout his argument to keep the psychical phenomena distinct from their physical accompaniments, it is a little curious that he should have slipped into such an unfortunate use of the word "nervous"—a word that threatens to blur the whole issue. When, by the severest analysis, we have followed psychical action down to its faint dawn in a simple response to the stimulus of the environment, we are no nearer than we were at the opening of the inquiry to a comprehension of the passage from nervous action to psychical action; that passage still remains, as Tyndall said, unthinkable. We have not explained how sensation arises; we do

not know how it is possible. And thus, as psychological analysis carries us no further than the psychical shock, it is with this, and not with the physical side of the double process, that synthesis must begin. (See on this point the very interesting note on p. 444 of vol. ii. of Fiske's *Cosmic Philosophy*. Mr. Fiske ventured to change "nervous" to "psychical," and adds that Spencer authorised him to say that in so doing he had his concurrence.)

highest conscious actions of the human race a series of actions displayed by the various tribes of the animal kingdom may be so placed as to render it impossible to say of any one step in the series, Here intelligence begins.<sup>1</sup>

The method of investigation that evolution has thus rendered possible has achieved, along with many other splendid triumphs, one very notable success. It has effected a permanent compromise between two great antagonistic schools of psychology—the experimentalist and the transcendentalist, or the followers of Locke on the other hand and those of Leibnitz and Kant on the other. This famous dispute, which antedated by centuries the celebrated philosophers with whose names it is now generally associated, and which, before the rise of the doctrine of evolution, promised to be perennial, concerned the nature of the human faculty. "All our knowledge is derived from experience" was the fundamental dictum of the empiricists. "On the contrary," replied their opponents, "we possess ideas which transcend experience—which are innate." Spencer, approaching the whole question from the evolutionary side, saw that the controversy from first to last was a controversy of partial views. The weakness of each system was that it accepted a portion of the truth for the entire truth. To say that, antecedent to experience, the mind is an absolute blank is, as he pointed out, to ignore the essential questions, "Whence comes the power of organising experiences? whence arise the different degrees of that power possessed by different races of organisms and different individuals of the same race?"<sup>2</sup> But is this to throw up the empirical case altogether? Not at all. The pre-estab-

lished internal relations of the innateness of which so much is made by the idealists, if transcendent to the experiences of the individual, are not transcendent to that vast chain of ancestral experience, running back through ages of barbarism and animality to the lowest beginnings of life, of which the present individual is only the terminal link. The moment the *venue* of discussion was changed from the limited area of individual experience to the immeasurable area of universal experience the ancient difficulty vanished. What the transcendentalist called *à priori* principles the evolutionist regards as *à priori* indeed to the individual, but *à posteriori* to the race; that is, as race experiences which in the individual appear as intuitions. We need no longer quarrel, therefore, over the so-called "forms of thought," and the question of relative potential intellectuality becomes clear. Of a surety the doctrine of evolution is a great moderator of philosophic discords, and, since it is notorious that philosophic discords have been almost as fierce and obstinate as controversies in the theological arena, it should receive a generous meed of the blessing promised to peacemakers.

A word of warning must be added ere we close these few paragraphs on the Spencerian psychology.

A superficial reading of what has just been written concerning the continuity of phenomena, and the impossibility of drawing any dividing line between physical and psychical life, might only too easily lead the unwary student to conclude that Spencer's doctrines end in materialism pure and simple. This, indeed, is the popular view of the matter, held to with solid tenacity despite continual protest and repeated disproof. Yet on no point did Spencer endeavour

<sup>1</sup> *Principles of Psychology* (first edition).

<sup>2</sup> *Principles of Psychology*, § 208.



to make himself more explicit. Already in the concluding paragraphs of *First Principles* he had done his utmost to show that the arguments contained in that work lend no support whatever to either of the current antagonistic views respecting the ultimate nature of things. "Their implications are no more materialistic than they are spiritualistic; and no more spiritualistic than they are materialistic," he there asserted; since our antithetic conceptions of spirit and matter, necessary as they must seem to us, are still nothing more than symbols of the Unknown Reality which underlies both. Developing this truth more fully in the *Principles of Psychology*, he thus declared himself in the chapter on "The Substance of Mind" (§ 63):—

Here.....we arrive at the barrier which needs to be perpetually pointed out, alike to those who seek materialistic explanations of mental phenomena and to those who are alarmed lest such explanations may be found. This last class prove by their fear, almost as much as the first prove by their hope, that they believe Mind may possibly be interpreted in terms of Matter; whereas many whom they vituperate as materialists are profoundly convinced that there is not the remotest possibility of so interpreting them. For those who, not deterred by foregone conclusions, have pushed their analysis to the uttermost see very clearly that the concept we form to ourselves of Matter is but the symbol of some form of power absolutely and forever unknown to us; and a symbol which we cannot suppose to be like the reality without involving ourselves in contradictions (*First Principles*, § 16). They also see that the representation of all objective activities in terms of Motion is but a representation of them, and not a knowledge of them; and that we are immediately brought to alternative absurdities if we assume the Power manifested to us as Motion to be in itself that which we conceive as Motion (*First Principles*, § 17). When with these conclusions, that Matter and Motion as we think them, are but symbolic of unknowable forms of existence, we join the conclusion lately reached that Mind also is unknowable, and

that the simplest form under which we can think of its substance is but a symbol of something that can never be rendered into thought; we see that the whole question is at last nothing more than the question whether these symbols should be expressed in terms of those or those in terms of these—a question scarcely worth deciding, since either answer leaves us as completely outside of the reality as we were at first.

The battle of Spiritualism and Materialism is, therefore, a battle merely of symbols and of words.

How thoroughly unmaterialistic is Spencer's whole view of the question is made manifest by the paragraph immediately following the one from which the above extract is taken. Here he distinctly says, once and for all, "that were we compelled to choose between the alternatives of translating mental phenomena into physical phenomena, or of translating physical phenomena into mental phenomena, the latter alternative would seem the more acceptable of the two." He proceeds to give, in the course of a long paragraph which well deserves the closest attention, his reasons for this assertion; and concluding that "of the two it seems easier to translate so-called Matter into so-called Spirit than to translate so-called Spirit into so-called Matter (which latter is, indeed, wholly impossible)," he again reminds us that, after all, "no translation can carry us beyond our symbols." After this, only the familiar ignorance, carelessness, and perversity of the general religious world can explain the fact that even to-day Spencer's teachings are frequently denounced as "materialistic." It is surprising how often the shortsightedness of the theologians has led them to treat with antagonism men who, if they only knew it, should rather be reckoned among the truest friends of religion.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE SPENCERIAN SOCIOLOGY

## I.

SPENCER'S social and political teachings are familiar enough in their main outlines to readers who otherwise know little or nothing of his works. The most popularly written and widely circulated of his books—the *Education* alone excepted—are those which deal directly with the problems arising from the relations of citizens to government and to one another. In the pages of *Social Statics*, *The Study of Sociology*, and *The Man versus The State*, these problems in their multifarious aspects are handled with extraordinary force, clearness, and logical illustration; and, though first principles are kept in view throughout, and are shown to constitute the firm foundation of every doctrine advanced—though in this way philosophic coherence and consistency are given to every chain of reasoning—the popular standpoint is that adopted; the arguments are directed rather to the general reader than to the special student. By the larger public, therefore, the individualistic principles which form the core of all his political teachings are accepted or rejected without any thought of their relation to his philosophic system as a whole; how they fall into the body of his work, and what exact place they occupy there, are questions that seldom come up for consideration.

This is the more natural because, even when we have grown tired, as Zschokke put it, of “living in the furnished lodgings of tradition,” very few of us

have thought out for ourselves a systematised theory of life. We have what we are pleased to call our ideas (usually more correctly to be described as our feelings) about most things; and the less we understand of a subject the stronger our assertions of opinion are likely to be. But these ideas rarely hang together among themselves—are rarely attached to any deep underlying principles. Their roots run down into the emotions; they draw their nourishment thence; and some accident of early education, environment, self-interest, or class-bias, gives them, unknown to ourselves, their special form and colour. It is curious in studying our friends—we are less likely to observe such inconsistencies in ourselves—to find, in consequence, what a strange jumble of contradictory notions the majority of them manage to find room for, without for a moment seeming to imperil thereby their self-satisfaction or peace of mind. The assertive radical, brought face to face with some novel form of an old question, unexpectedly develops a rabid conservatism: the bigoted conservative advocates on some special isolated point doctrines which, applied to other and perhaps more familiar issues, he would look upon with horror. Men who are urging the world forward in one direction are holding it back in others; and the gospels of yesterday and to-morrow are proclaimed in one breath by the same preacher. Few realise the absurdity of all this; few

are aware of the anarchy of thought and incongruity of social aims to which it must inevitably give rise; fewer still, perhaps, understand that it is due to the absence in most men—even in those of general intelligence and more than average culture—of a methodical habit of mind, and the guiding power of some great central principles, to the touchstone of which every judgment and opinion may be brought.

Caring nothing for the coherence of their own ideas, most readers naturally fail to inquire into the coherence of the ideas of other people. Hence they are willing to deal with that one department of the Spencerian thought which happens to come under their particular notice without troubling to raise the question of its connection with other departments. Spencer's individualism may or may not organically belong to and of necessity grow out of the principles of evolution as expounded by him; but, while they will discuss the individualism itself, this is the last matter that is likely to detain them. Hence it is precisely this point we propose to deal with here. To expound Spencer's social and political views in their practical applications would, considering how frequently and in what popular language he himself set them forth, be a work of supererogation; to discuss them would lie outside the scope of our plan. But to show how these views are affiliated upon the main body of his thought will be to carry out to the full the design of this introduction.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There is the more need to do this, first, because many otherwise loyal adherents of Spencerianism have refused to follow their teacher into the extremes of his political thought; and, secondly, because of the opinion, widely diffused among them, that his social doctrines, espoused long

## II.

The once famous saying of Sir James Mackintosh, that "constitutions are not made, but grow," struck the men of his time as singularly original and suggestive; which will not surprise us when we remember the purely mechanical theories of social history which had stood unchallenged during the eighteenth century, and were still current when he wrote. But, as Spencer says, "in our day the most significant thing" about it is "that it was ever thought so significant." Not only has the principle enunciated in it long since passed into a commonplace, but from the evolutionary standpoint we all now see that it forms but a small portion of a much larger truth. Under all its aspects and through all its ramifications society itself is the result of slow and natural development, not of artificial contrivance—a growth and not a manufacture. This means that it must be dealt with, not as a mechanism, but as a living thing.

The comparison between society and an individual organism had been instituted before Spencer's time, but in a way too vague for it to be productive of much result. Spencer, in taking the matter up among his earlier studies, endeavoured to do something more than point out more or less fanciful analogies. Utilising the comprehensive generalisations of modern biology, he undertook to indicate the real parallelisms.<sup>2</sup>

before the working out of his general system, have since been cleverly dovetailed into that system, and form no proper part of it. As this whole subject is a vast and complicated one for brief treatment, I may be perhaps allowed to record that Spencer himself expressed entire satisfaction with my analysis of his arguments and conclusions.

<sup>2</sup> These parallelisms, outlined in the article



These are four in number, and may be summarised in succinct statement thus :—

1. Commencing as small aggregations, both societies and individual organisms insensibly augment in mass, in some instances eventually reaching a bulk ten thousand times greater than their original size.

2. At first so simple in structure as to be considered structureless, both societies and individual organisms assume in the course of their growth a continually increasing complexity of structure.

3. In a society in its early undeveloped state, as in an individual organism in its early and undeveloped state, there exists scarcely any mutual dependence of parts ; in both cases the parts gradually acquire a mutual dependence, and this becomes at last so great that the life and activity of each part are made possible only by the life and activity of the rest.

4. The life and development of a society, like the life and development of an individual organism, are independent of and far more prolonged than the life and development of any of its component units, who severally are born, grow, reproduce, and die, while the body politic composed of them survives generation after generation, increasing in mass, completeness of structure, and functional activity.

Consideration of these striking parallels will reveal the fact that the most important of them—the second and third in the above tabulation—present elements that bring the growth of society directly under the general law of evolution. Societies, like individual organisms, pass, during the course of their development, from simplicity to complexity of structure, at the same time that their various parts gradually acquire greater and greater mutual dependence ; in other words, the changes undergone by them are in the direction at once of

increasing heterogeneity and of increasing unity. It may, indeed, be remarked incidentally that no more conspicuous illustrations of the formula of evolution can be found than those furnished by the study of social growth. Barbarous tribes, lowest in the scale of development, are nothing but loose, almost homogeneous, aggregations of individuals and families, living in contiguity, but hardly at all depending one upon another. Powers and functions are practically alike, the only marked differences being those which accompany difference of sex. "Every man is warrior, hunter, fisherman, toolmaker, builder ; every woman performs the same drudgeries"—that is, there is as yet no specialisation of parts ; and similarly, "every family is self-sufficing, and, save for purposes of aggression and defence, might as well live apart from the rest"—there is little or no mutual dependence. Very early, however, important changes manifest themselves. Differentiation begins. With the appearance of some kind of chieftainship arises distinction between the governing and the governed ; and as this distinction grows more and more decided, the controlling agencies themselves gradually break up, and in course of time develop into the highly complex political organisations of semi-civilised and civilised lands. Meanwhile the accompanying industrial divergencies are even more significant. Individuals, no longer continuing to perform for themselves all the functions necessary for the preservation of their own lives and the lives of those immediately connected with them, begin to devote themselves to separate kinds of occupation ; whence arise the first suggestions of that industrial specialisation which has been carried to such an extreme in our own day, and which with

on "The Social Organism" (first published in the *Westminster Review* for January, 1860), were subsequently worked out in detail in the *Principles of Sociology*, Part II. See also the essay on "Specialised Administration."

every year is tending to become more marked. But one all-important fact must never be lost sight of. These changes along the line of ever-increasing heterogeneity can go on step by step only in combination with corresponding changes along the line of ever-increasing integration. The governing agency can assume the labours and responsibilities of oversight, guidance, and direction only by being relieved, to a degree proportionate to the demand of these upon it, of the daily strain of providing for its own wants. In this way alone can the regulative and maintaining agencies become distinct. Similarly with the industrial changes themselves. As soon as any one individual limits himself to the performance of one particular life-sustaining function, for which he may possess unusual aptitude, he must necessarily become dependent upon the rest of the community to the extent of the functions left unfulfilled by him; while he performs certain functions in excess, and thereby benefits others, others must also perform functions in excess for his benefit. Hence, it is clear that, if society is to maintain its corporate life, no differentiation can take place without integration; increase of specialisation in social changes is not only accompanied by increase of mutual dependence, but is absolutely impossible without it.

From the first stages of social growth to the developments recorded in yesterday's newspaper, what we call progress has everywhere been marked by the same characteristics. All changes in the line of advance have been changes rendering the social structure more complex while increasing its organic unity; and this double-sided movement has by this time gone so far that we are to-day witnessing its effects in the modified inter-relations

of the great nations of the civilised world. The new thought of the solidarity of the human race simply reminds us of the application of the evolutionary principle to the widest possible issues. For not only are the great nations becoming more and more completely specialised and unified within themselves, but the civilised world is itself slowly developing into a vast organic whole, made up of many such highly differentiated but mutually dependent aggregations.

Two important aspects of the principles here indicated must now be re-emphasised as presenting truths to which we shall recur later on. In the first place, in the social as in the individual organism, repetition of similar parts implies a relatively low stage of development, higher stages being characterised by the marking off of special organs for the performance of special functions. In the second place, the activity of every organ being limited, adequate performance of its special function by each organ is incompatible with continuance on its part to perform other functions. That its own function may be duly carried on, it must be relieved by other organs of the need for sustaining other activities.

Having thus indicated the principal parallelisms between societies and individual organisms, Spencer proceeds to point out their chief differences. As there is no necessity here for us to follow him into his consideration and discussion of these, we will confine ourselves to the briefest enumeration of them. He finds the contrasts also to be four in number:

1. Societies have no specific external forms.
2. The living tissue whereof an individual organism consists forms a continuous mass; the living elements of a society do not form a continuous mass, but are more or less

widely dispersed over some portion of the earth's surface.

3. The ultimate living elements of an individual organism are mostly fixed in their relative positions ; those of the social organism are capable of moving from place to place.

4. In the body of an animal only a special tissue is endowed with feeling ; in a society all the members are endowed with feeling.

With much ingenuity Spencer labours to show that these obvious contrasts are neither so fundamental nor so important as would at first sight appear. This part of the matter, however, does not now concern us. But the last-named distinction between the social and the individual organism should be looked at a little more closely, because it points to a profound truth of immediate moment to us here. For what does this distinction imply? It implies nothing less than this—that there is a radical difference between the relations of parts and whole in the individual organism, and the relations of parts and whole in the social organism.

While in individual bodies the welfare of all other parts is rightly subservient to the welfare of the nervous system, whose pleasurable or painful activities make up the good or ill of life ; in bodies politic the same thing does not hold, or holds to but a very slight extent. It is well that the lives of all parts of an animal should be merged in the life of the whole, because the whole has a corporate consciousness capable of happiness or misery. But it is not so with a society, since its living units do not and cannot lose individual consciousness, and since the community as a whole has no corporate consciousness. And this is an everlasting reason why the welfares of citizens cannot rightly be sacrificed to some supposed benefit of the State : but why, on the other hand, the State is to be maintained solely for the benefit of citizens. The corporate life must here be subservient to the lives of the parts, instead of the lives of the parts being subservient to the corporate life.\*

\* "The Social Organism" (*Essays*, vol. i.).

### III.

This, which at first sight might seem to be a conclusion standing by itself, and of no further use to us, may for present purposes be taken as a new point of departure. Let us examine in detail the question of the relations of parts to whole in the social organism.

From the earliest developments of gregariousness to the latest extension of governmental activity, the only ultimate authority for the restraints exercised by society in its corporate capacity over its individual members is the welfare of the individual members. The welfare of society is the proximate end only ; the final end is the welfare of the units of which the society is composed. This has been made clear by the above considerations. But does this mean that the relations of the individual to the corporate life should be or could be of a stable or unchanging character? From the evolutionary standpoint such an idea is on the face of it untenable. On the contrary, such relations must inevitably vary with the varying conditions of social growth. The social organism, like all other organisms whatsoever, must mould the activities of its inner life in response to outer needs. Only by adequately meeting those needs can its existence be maintained, and, while the ultimate end of social organisation can never be other than that alleged, furtherance of that ultimate end may often be impossible, save by temporary postponement of it to the proximate end ; in other words, the welfare of society may have to take precedence of the welfare of the individual, and individual life be sacrificed to social preservation. We may put the matter even more strongly, and state at once that throughout the past the proximate



end, that of social preservation, has habitually been of prime importance, the claims of the individual in contradistinction to those of the corporate body having only gradually emerged as vital issues. In all transitional states, indeed, the relations of which we speak must necessarily be relations of compromise; but such compromise will favour the whole as against the parts, or the parts as against the whole, according to the type of social organisation—the type itself being evolved in answer to the medium of social needs. The question therefore arises, How do the general conditions of any given society tend to determine the relations of its citizens to the State?

The evolution of life at large, alike in its higher and in its lower forms, has been possible only because in the average of cases there has throughout been a definite connection between conduct and consequence. But for the fact that individuals structurally best adapted to the conditions of their existence have prospered by means of such fuller adaptation, while individuals less favourably endowed have dropped out in the struggle for existence, no advance in life could ever have taken place. This law, which, ethically enunciated, becomes the principle that each individual ought to receive the good and evil arising from his own nature, is the primary law of existence, holding good of all creatures, and qualified in those living solitary lives only by that "self-subordination needed among the higher of them for the rearing of offspring."

In non-gregarious creatures, therefore, the only conflict is between self-subserving and race-subserving activities; and species which do not postpone in requisite degrees the former class of

activities to the latter will inevitably disappear. But in gregarious creatures another factor comes into play. Each individual in the pursuit of his own satisfactions must be prevented from interfering with the similar pursuit of their own satisfactions on the part of others; for in the absence of such prevention an associated state would be impossible, and each individual would lose the benefits that co-operation would bring. The associated state, therefore, demands, in addition to that large postponement of self to offspring which lies at the bottom of all life, a constant postponement of self to fellows, negatively by restraint of actions that impede, and positively by performance of actions that further, the fullest and most harmonious co-operation.

Putting these two principles together, we are able to establish an important conclusion. The prerequisite of life in general embodied in the first must be qualified in the way indicated by the second when the individual, no longer isolated, lives in association with others whose presence and claims necessarily limit the range of his activities. Hence we reach the formula of absolute justice.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This may be the proper place to point out a distinctive feature in Spencer's Ethics—the separation of absolute from relative ethics. Absolutely right conduct is conduct having no concomitant of pain, or painful consequences, either to self or others; all other conduct, though it may be relatively right, or the least wrong possible in the circumstances, is not absolutely right. In the drawing up of a code of absolute morality, therefore, we must consider the ideal man in an ideal state of society; and relative morality must then aim to approximate to this as closely as is possible under any given conditions. In discussing the Spencerian ethics this vital distinction must never be lost sight of. See *Data of Ethics*, chap. xv., and compare this

"Every man is free to do that which he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man."

But now we have to notice that under certain conditions these abstract principles require still further qualification. The ultimate authority for the existence of the associated state is, as we have seen, the increased welfare that all its individual units are enabled to obtain by means of it. This renders the preservation of the associated state itself of the first importance; and when it is imperilled, sacrifice of the individual to secure its continuance receives strong ethical sanction. This fact gives us the clue for which we are in search in our inquiry as to how the relations of citizen to State depend upon existing social conditions. For the welfare of the individual can only, ethically considered, take entire and immediate precedence of the welfare of the community at large so long as the community itself is not in danger—in other words, during periods of sustained peace. During periods of military activity or preparation—that is, when rightly or wrongly it is supposed that the community is jeopardised from without—the individual has, to a large extent, to be made subservient to the State, often even to the extent of being called upon to surrender property and life to aid in keeping the social structure intact.

We see, then, that in the social organism the relations of parts to whole depend upon the average activities of the whole. So long as the community is engaged in a struggle for existence with antagonistic communities, its corporate

life has to be maintained at any cost—even at the cost of its component units; and societies in which this necessity is most completely met stand, other things equal, the best chance of preservation. Sanction for the temporary postponement of the individual to the State is thus obtained; but this sanction holds good only so long as the specified conditions continue. Just as soon as the external struggle for existence ceases, the sanction for the postponement of the individual to the State can no longer be alleged, and all qualification lapses in regard to the principles above set forth.

#### IV.

Before we can appreciate the full significance of this conclusion, we must look at the matter for a moment from a somewhat different point of view.

Theoretically, three kinds of social aggregation may be distinguished, according to the purposes which association is intended to subserve. Men may group themselves together (1) merely for the sake of companionship; (2) for combined action against enemies, animal or human, or both; or (3) for better satisfaction by means of reciprocal aid of the various requirements of life—higher as well as lower.<sup>1</sup> The resulting aggregates may

<sup>1</sup> *Justice*, § 102. All this does not, of course, mean that men have ever *consciously* banded themselves together for any one or more of these purposes. We have here nothing to do with the monstrous fiction of a social contract, which was one of the favourite theories of earlier political speculation, from the days of Hobbes and Locke onward, and which at the hands of its greatest exponent, Rousseau, became charged with immense revolutionary power. We simply recognise that, according to obtaining conditions, association has been naturally brought about here in response to one kind of demand, there in response to another.

with *Social Statics*, Part I., chap. i., and the article on "Absolute Political Ethics" (*Essays*, vol. iii.).

be defined respectively as non-co-operative, military, and industrial.

Of the first an instance is found in the case of the Esquimaux, who live in groups, but who, having no external enemies, never combine for purposes of corporate offence and defence, and among whom industrial co-operation has gone no further than a division of labour between man and wife in each separate family. Examples of the second class are of course very numerous, and may be found in the purest form in "hunting-tribes at large, the activities of which alternate between chasing animals and going to war with one another," and in which industrial co-operation, if exhibited at all, is exhibited only in a very rudimentary way. When we come to the third division we are met, in search for illustrations, by the difficulty arising from lack of material. The purely industrial society does not yet exist in a developed form. A few perfectly peaceful tribes are to be found here and there in the world—like the Bodos, the Dhimáls, and the Kocchs—who, never needing to combine for aggression or defence, do yet to some extent render mutual assistance in the simple activities of their daily lives. But all advanced peoples without exception, as well as most of those relatively low down in the scale of civilisation, yield examples of association for the achievement of all the three ends above distinguished. The desire for social intercourse is satisfied; life is made easier and larger by means of industrial co-operation; but at the same time there is still need for corporate action, if not of an aggressive, then, at any rate, of a defensive nature.

Now, the fact that even the most fully industrialised of developed societies are still *quasi*-military in their constitution

introduces us to an important truth. Antagonistic as are the military and the industrial activities, throughout the whole course of social evolution, from the very beginning until now, the former has played a main part in the development of the latter. But for war, little advance would have been possible. War has been essentially the consolidating factor, and its ever-widening sweep has in the upshot only cleared a larger area for the play of industrial forces. Each new integration brought about by conquest has ultimately changed the warlike relations formerly existing between the communities integrated into relations of a peaceful character; their interests, instead of being antagonistic, become interdependent. As this process, which has gone on from the earliest dawn of human history, continues, its results, though of the same general nature, will be on a grander scale. Eventually, war will bring about its own destruction by aiding in the production, throughout a world-area, of those industrial conditions which will render anti-industrial relations henceforth impossible.

Recognising this fact—which is indeed one of too much significance ever to be lost sight of—we can understand how it is that even the most highly-civilised nations are still in a transitional state. A factor of supreme importance in the earlier stages of their development, war, though of ever-decreasing importance in their more advanced stages, has, down to quite recent times, played a large part in the unification of national interests, which is one phase of all social progress. Hence, we can for the time being reach nothing better than a compromise between the demands of military co-operation on the one hand and the demands of industrial co-operation on



the other. But here a further distinction is to be made. This compromise, formerly in favour of the military claims, is now (in some modern countries considerably and in a few markedly) in favour of the industrial claims. While hitherto the all-important thing was to keep up military efficiency, and industry was valued only to the extent to which it aided in doing this, now, on the contrary, industrial growth is the all-important thing, and military efficiency is valued only in so far as, by yielding adequate protection, it furthers peaceful co-operation. Hence, though, among the more advanced societies, we cannot specify any as absolutely military or absolutely industrial, we can still divide them according as the warlike activities take precedence of the peaceful, or the reverse, into two classes, which we may call the military-industrial and the industrial-military.

What, now, should we infer to be, and do we actually find to be, the characteristic differences of these two classes of societies? Their most salient and fundamental points of distinction may be briefly summarised.\*

In the military-industrial type, the corporate life being the unit of organisation, we have centralised control, despotic rule, and widely-ramified gradations of rank. As reflecting the average life of the community, the religion is one of enmity—is marked by the prominence of stern doctrines and a vindictive spirit; while the ecclesiastical system exhibits an elaborate hierarchy closely resembling the hierarchy of the political system. Meanwhile, industrial activities, regarded only as factors for the sus-

tentation of the military system, are not only despised as vulgar, but are more or less subjected to State interference and control; and since it is the welfare of the State that is always held in view, the general life of the community is dealt with in any way that may seem to secure higher corporate capacity. Thus the *régime* is one of compulsory co-operation. The individual belongs to the State and exists for the State.

Over against this we may set the leading characteristics of the industrial-military type. The need for such corporate action as is called for in war having largely lapsed, there is a relative absence of centralised control; democratic rule gradually supersedes despotic rule; and the old gradations of rank slowly lose their meaning and tend to disappear. The harsher traits of the religious creed drop away, and, in answer to the peaceful life of the society, gentler and more humane aspects come into relief. Along with this goes the breaking up of the ecclesiastical as of the political hierarchy, and the rise and spread of nonconformity. Industrial activities, no longer considered only as furnishing maintenance for the State, little by little rise in general esteem and free themselves from State control and dictation, while the individual, ceasing to be simply a servant of the general community, refuses to tolerate the interference of the community in the various pursuits of his private life. This is the *régime* of voluntary co-operation. The State exists simply for the individual.

It is hardly necessary to say that, omitting the many other cases that might be cited in illustration, the history of civilisation during the past three or four hundred years has shown, along with gradual decrease in military activity,

\* *Principles of Sociology*, §§ 258-262. See also the article on "Specialised Administration."

a distinct, though of course by no means regular, movement away from the military-industrial type of social organisation and towards the industrial-military type. This movement, though general, has gone further in some countries than in others; and the contrast presented to-day between England and America on the one hand, and the great continental nations of Europe on the other, is a striking and instructive one. All this is manifest enough; but there is another point, equally significant in its way, that might easily escape attention. The metamorphosis in question goes on only while conditions remain favourable; as soon as they become unfavourable, a retrograde tendency asserts itself almost immediately. No lessons of recent history are more weighty than those taught by this social atavism. After remarking, in the course of one of his many contributions to the discussion of this subject, that, just before the civil war in America, industrialisation had advanced to such an extent in the Northern States that "military organisation had almost disappeared, and everything martial had fallen into contempt," Spencer continues:—

During the late war in America Mr. Seward's boast—"I touch this bell, and any man in the remotest State is a prisoner of the Government" (a boast which was not an empty one, and which was by many of the Republican party greatly applauded)—shows us how rapidly, along with militant activities, there tends to be resumed the needful type of centralised structure, and how there quickly grow up the corresponding sentiments and ideas. Our own history since 1815 has shown a double change of this kind. During the thirty years' peace the militant organisation dwindled, the military sentiment greatly decreased, the industrial organisation rapidly developed, the assertion of the individuality of the citizen became more decided, and many restrictive and despotic regulations were

got rid of. Conversely, since the revival of militant activities and structures on the Continent our own offensive and defensive structures have been redeveloping; and the tendency towards increase of that centralised control which accompanies such structures has become marked.\*

Could we do so without committing ourselves to an unmanageable digression, we might profitably consider this subject in some of its remoter bearings. For—to indicate a few points only—the marked increase in military activity which has taken place among ourselves during recent years has not only brought about this increase in centralised control and corresponding tendency to tamper with the liberty of the individual, but has also been necessarily accompanied by the revival of many characteristics of the military type of society—excessive loyalty to rulers; deference to authority; reassertion of the claims of the privileged classes; greater activity and power of the priesthood; intellectual reaction all along the line. Nor is this all. Less obvious, but not less important, changes may meanwhile be noted in the general temper of society. The recrudescence of militarism and the national spirit of aggression has everywhere called into play the feelings which properly belong to the stage of barbarism; and the love of violence is shown (among countless other ways) by the immense popularity of all kinds of literature and art which deal with deeds of turbulence and bloodshed; by the current mania for athleticism and the worship of physical strength and prowess; and by the re-establishment of brutal sports. It is a truth which few people seem able to appreciate that there is a vital relationship between the character of the life of

\* "Specialised Administration." See also *Justice*, § 72, etc.

a society and the character of the lives of its component units; that national violence will be always attended by individual violence; and that, in a word, it is practically useless to preach the gospel of love to the men and women of a nation while the nation itself is living according to the gospel of hate.<sup>1</sup>

But now, returning to the main line of our argument, we have to ask: What practical conclusions are we to draw from the inquiries which we have instituted?

First, that the rise of individual independence of the State, and the decrease of State meddling with the multitudinous affairs of private life, have naturally accompanied the gradual decline of militancy and the slow reconstruction of the great nations of the world upon an industrial basis. Such has been throughout the most noteworthy characteristic of social evolution.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, that as, from first to last, the end to be achieved by society in its corporate capacity is the welfare of its units, the ethical warrant for the coercion of the individual by the State, derived from the condition of war, disappears as war itself ceases, and cannot be alleged as holding for a condition of peace. And, thirdly, that those who seek to reverse the order of social evolution by re-expansion of the scope of State activity and power are endeavouring to fit down artificially a system belonging properly

to one type of social structure upon the other type of social structure, which has all along been outgrowing it—are engaged, therefore, in a retrogressive enterprise, which is in the very nature of things foredoomed to disaster.<sup>3</sup>

## V.

But these conclusions, important though they are, do not represent the whole of the case. Not only during the course of social development does ethical sanction for State interference with the individual gradually decline, but the relinquishment of such interference is seen, from the evolutionary point of view, to be a necessary accompaniment of the increasingly adequate performance on the part of government of the special functions for which it is properly responsible.

Here we must revert to the principle of the physiological division of labour, already touched upon. It has been shown that repetition of similar parts, whether in an individual structure or in society, implies lowness of organisation, evolution being everywhere characterised by the complexity resulting from the multiplication of different parts fulfilling different duties. Beyond this it has been made clear that specialisation of function brings with it limitation of function. "At the same time that each part grows adapted to the particular duty it has to discharge it grows un-

<sup>1</sup> This is a truth upon which Spencer was never weary of insisting, and to which he returned in his very last book (see the essay on "Re-Barbarisation," in *Facts and Comments*).

<sup>2</sup> An interesting side-light is thrown upon this whole question of the gradual development of personality by such books as Sidney Lanier's *English Novel* and Mr. H. M. Posnett's *Comparative Literature*, in the "International Scientific" Series.

<sup>3</sup> It is not by accident that socialistic schemes flourish most in a military atmosphere. In Germany, "where militancy is most pronounced, and where the regulation of citizens is most elaborate, socialism is most highly developed; and from the head of the German military system has now come the proposal of regimental regulations for the working classes throughout Europe" (*Justice*, § 26).



adapted to all other duties"<sup>1</sup>—a truth exemplified alike in biology and in political economy. The application of this principle to the matter in hand is obvious. "The governmental part of the body politic exemplifies this truth equally with its other parts. In virtue of this universal law, a Government cannot gain ability to perform its special work without losing such ability as it had to perform other work."<sup>2</sup>

Hence we must meet, with a more definite answer than has yet been given or implied, the question, What is the special work of a Government?

We have said that the only ultimate sanction for social organisation in any form is the welfare of the individual units. Co-operation secures for all a larger and fuller life than each could secure for himself; and the business of the community in its corporate capacity is to maintain the conditions which make co-operation possible. How can it do this? By protecting the individual in such a way that in each case the fundamental laws of life shall not be interfered with; in other words, by securing that state of things which enables each citizen to receive the full benefit of his character and activities, subject only to the limitations necessarily imposed upon him by the presence of fellow-citizens having like claims.

That this, and this alone, is the true function of the State, is proved (though not only in this way) by the striking fact that, whatever may have been the other duties assumed or rejected by Governments in various places and at different

times, this duty has never been overlooked. The earliest and the latest developments of social structure, differ though they may in every other respect, alike hold this end in view. Positive regulation of the citizen by the community has varied all the world over, and varies still in extent, rigour, and direction; negative regulation has uniformly been accepted, theoretically at any rate, as coming directly within the range of governmental activity.

This is clearly brought out by a comparison of the military and industrial types of society. We have seen that the relation of the individual to the community immediately depends upon the social structure evolved in response to average needs. Yet though, where the activities are predominantly warlike, the unit apparently exists for the sake of the whole, while where the activities are predominantly peaceful the whole clearly exists for the sake of the unit, in each case the ethical authority for State regulation, be this small or great, is ultimately the maintenance of the conditions pre-requisite to peaceful co-operation. During periods of antagonistic relations with other communities the main business of government, therefore, is to protect society from external enemies, internal regulation being wholly subservient to this special end. When, with the gradual cessation of war, this function lapses, there remains still the duty of maintaining the conditions pre-requisite to peaceful co-operation in other ways—namely, by protecting society from internal enemies. And now let us note the supremely important inference. In the one case, as in the other, ethical sanction warrants the interference of the State with the individual so far as is necessary to achieve

<sup>1</sup> "Representative Government: What is it good for?" (*Essays*, vol. iii.).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Compare the essay on "Over-Legislation" (*Essays*, vol. iii.).

the object here set forth, and no further. As in the military *régime* no moral right can be shown to exist for State coercion of citizens beyond the point required for successful resistance to antagonistic societies, so in the industrial *régime* no moral right can be shown to exist for State coercion of citizens beyond the point required for successful resistance to antagonistic units; State functions are ethically limited to the maintenance of strictly equitable relations among the separate members of the community. Thus we come round from another side to the formula of abstract justice already given. Every man must be held free to do that which he wills, provided only he infringes not the equal freedom of other men; and the duty of the State is to guard each individual citizen from such infringement. When the State itself commits such infringement, therefore, it not only exceeds its duty, but it becomes actually guilty of that which it is its immediate and express duty to prevent.

Such, then, is the proper function of the State, and in fitting itself more completely for this the State necessarily, as we have seen, becomes less fit for anything else. In low, undeveloped forms of society the essential work of protection against enemies, internal and external, is performed with extreme imperfection, at the same time that it is encumbered with countless other kinds of work which do not appertain to government at all. But with social evolution progressive differentiation, while gradually relieving the ruling agency of these multitudinous extra duties, enables it to discharge its own particular function with ever-increasing efficiency.<sup>5</sup> Thus the natural tendency is towards specialised administration—towards the production of a type of

government best adapted for the proper work of government, and *therefore* least adapted for any other sort of work whatsoever.<sup>5</sup>

This doctrine has been called by all sorts of hard names, not only by avowed socialists, but by many "practical legislators" and "common-sense politicians," who, while they would be horrified at the thought of being identified with the socialists, are constantly favouring movements that are socialistic under the thinnest possible disguise. But it is safe to say that the majority of those who are so loud in their anathemas of Spencer's individualism are utterly unaware that it has anything but a negative side. Familiar with Spencer's unmeasured denunciation of State interference—denunciation everywhere backed up by long arrays of facts—they seem to think that there the matter ends. But there the matter does not end. The truth, already implied in the above considerations, and now to be definitely set forth, is simply this: that while Spencer protests against the continual meddling of Government with affairs that do not concern it, he advocates at the same time a more and more complete and conscientious discharge on its part of the business that properly falls within its scope. Hitherto, and at the present time, over-legislation, where legislation is not wanted, has inevitably been accompanied by under-legislation where legislation is sadly called for; things are regulated that ought to be left to take care of themselves, and, as a necessary consequence, other things are left to take care of themselves that ought to be regulated. Spencer always sought to

<sup>5</sup> See particularly the essay on "Representative Government: What is it good for?"

turn the scale to the other side—curtailing governmental activity in one direction, but expanding it in another.

In his conversation on "The Americans"<sup>1</sup> (October 20th, 1882) there is a passage of special interest bearing directly upon this point. "But we thought, Mr. Spencer," said the interviewer, referring to some remarks that had just passed concerning the relation of the individual to the community, "you were in favour of free government in the sense of relaxed restraints, and letting men and things very much alone, or what is called *laissez-faire*." "That," answered Spencer, "is a persistent misunderstanding of my opponents. Everywhere, along with the reprobation of government intrusion into various spheres where private activities should be left to themselves, I have contended that in its special sphere—the maintenance of equitable relations among citizens—governmental action should be extended and elaborated."

How often this contention was made by him careful study of even the more popular of Spencer's political writings will make clear. The question was one,

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted in the collected edition of his *Essays*, vol. iii.

indeed, to which he returned again and again.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, as it is not our purpose here to follow the general doctrine that we have outlined into details, we must rest content if we have shown that this positive view of the matter, so commonly lost sight of, is nevertheless of the essence of the whole. The object of this chapter, as stated at the outset, has been not to expound Spencer's social and political teachings in their particular applications, or to enter into any discussion of them from so-called practical points of view, but to indicate the principal lines of contact between them and the body of his thought. Enough has been said to prove that his individualism, so far from being artificially foisted on to the rest of his system, as even some friendly critics would have us believe, grows naturally out of, and, therefore, properly belongs to, it—is an organic part of his general doctrine of universal evolution.

<sup>1</sup> See especially the essays, already so frequently referred to, on "Representative Government," "Over-Legislation," and "Specialised Administration"; also "Political Institutions," *passim*; *The Study of Sociology: Postscript*; and *Justice*, chap. xxv., which last compare with *Social Statics*, chaps. xxi., xxii.



## CHAPTER V.

## THE ETHICAL SYSTEM OF SPENCER

## I.

Has the doctrine of evolution modified our conceptions of morality? Has it in any way helped to establish the principles of right living upon a firm, scientific foundation? These are questions that meet us on the threshold of such a study as we are to take up in the present chapter, and they must be dealt with before we can place Spencer's contributions to ethical science in their proper light, or understand their full significance.

The struggle of a new idea concerning the universe with the old ideas whose peaceful reign it disturbs almost invariably passes through two stages—a stage of positive antagonism and a stage of high-handed conciliation. At the outset it is war to the knife. Champions of the older order rush into the lists, intent on proving not so much that the new thought is untrue as that it is inexpedient. They ask the world not to examine the evidence, but to calculate the consequences. If the ancient cosmology is overthrown, and the philosophy of life so long based upon it crumbles to pieces as a necessary result, then, argues the reactionist, we know what we have to expect. The foundations of morality will be swept away; social disintegration will follow; religion itself will perish. A thousand pulpits take up the warning cry; the Press teems with hysterical vaticinations; strong voices are raised in argument or appeal.<sup>1</sup> Amid all the

angry outcry and popular confusion that ensues, the new thought holds secure its tiny germ of life. While men work, and wrangle, and sleep, it makes its silent way; and before the world realises the vastness of the change that has been wrought in its midst, the truth comes to be recognised as true. Then, strangely enough, we hear nothing more of the disastrous consequences that were to follow in its train. The moment for conciliation has arrived, and the attitude of the conservative is soon taken up. Where is the need of all this excitement? he asks. We all know the thing is true—in theory; but, after all, it is only a theory, and what difference does it make one way or the other? You are quite overrating the practical importance of the whole issue. The world is neither better nor worse for the revelation. The old religion is untouched, the old morality remains just where it was before.

Through these two stages of experience, no less than almost every other great theory that science has given to the world, the doctrine of evolution has passed on its way to general recognition. At first the Cassandra voices raised against it were of the loudest and the most persistent. The end of the moral cosmos was at hand. Natural selection was to give us a cold, bloodless system of unrestrained appetite, untempered egoism, unrelieved brutality, in place of the benign and simple altruism of the

powerful essay on "Morality and Theism" in his *Guesses at the Riddle of Existence*.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Professor Goldwin Smith's

Sermon on the Mount. The higher feelings were to have no further play ; every quality that had beautified the life of saint and martyr and philanthropist was to vanish before the new gospel of the survival of the fittest in the universal struggle for existence. Every one for himself, and the weakest to the wall—that was to be the modern transliteration of the Golden Rule, with what frightful results to the humanity of the future it was hardly needful to specify.\* The prophetic picture drawn was dire enough, it is true; the more wonder surely (for all this, let us remember, took place not at the period of the Reformation, but within the memory of men now living) that it has so soon been all but forgotten. For the intellectual offspring and representatives of these passionate opponents of evolution in the early years of its growth are anxious to have us know that they at least are not afraid of it. Why should they be? It was, as they now discover, implied in all their teaching long before the days of Darwin and Spencer ; and, as a matter of fact, it adds nothing, one way or the other, to the discussion of

the great practical questions of life. The end of the moral cosmos at hand? Oh, no ; for evolution, though it may have thrown some new light upon biology, has nothing whatever to do with ethics. Any attempt to work it out into practical applications will only reveal its sterility. Let the scientists do what they like about it, then. We are not concerned. Our morality is still the morality of them of old time. Evolution has not changed it, not even in the slightest particular.

In what sense it may be maintained that there is a large element of truth in this sweeping declaration, as well as the careful qualification which it requires, will become clear later on. There is one point, however, that we may conveniently deal with at once. It is commonly and properly said that the whole edifice of modern science is founded upon the datum of causation. The belief in the uniformity of Nature and of natural processes is exactly that which all our investigation is widening, deepening, and everywhere making more and more secure ; and so strong is the hold that it has already taken upon the cultivated mind, that it is now admitted on all sides, by those whose training in exact methods of inquiry renders them competent to judge, that there is no room left for the ancient theological conceptions of the causeless, the lawless, the arbitrary, in the material universe as it stands revealed to our ken. The persistent tendency of all evolutionary thought has been to emphasise this sense of the universality of law where it was already present, and to introduce it where it did not exist before. In this way, as a thoughtful writer on evolutionary morals has well pointed out, the doctrine of evolution has really contributed more to ethics than to the natural sciences.

\* It is perhaps worth while to notice that, in ethical speculations on the influence of the doctrine of evolution, survival of the fittest is too often taken to mean survival of the physically strongest. This, for instance, is the mistake made by Oliver Luttrell in Sir Walter Besant's *Ball of St. Paul's* ; and his reasoning upon the subject is characteristic of a widespread error in general thought. The idea of the preservation of altruistic instincts by the selection of the groups in which these are strongest, and of the development of clan-sympathies and paternal feelings through the part these play in social evolution, never seems to enter the popular mind. Nor is the great fact commonly recognised that the qualities which ensure the survival of a society may not be of advantage to the individual, except that indirectly he gains or suffers with the group of which he is a unit.

These latter "at least recognised before the appearance of the theory of evolution the element of constancy ordinarily called law, and attempted to formulate this constancy as a basis of thought and action."<sup>1</sup> But in ethics no such systematic attempt had been made, morality being, indeed, expressly regarded as a region outside and above the domain of law. With the application of evolutionary theories to moral principles went for the first time the emphatic assertion that the connection of cause and effect must be taken to hold good in moral no less than in natural science; that, indeed, only on recognition of this connection is any science of ethics possible. While the evolutionary theory, therefore, only strengthened and deepened the conception of causation already existing in other departments of research, it may be said almost to have introduced that conception into investigations on the subject of morality. Something of what is meant by the great change in thought thus brought about we shall see presently. Here we may well bear in mind the fact that, if the doctrine of evolution had done no more than impregnate sociological discussion with this principle of causation, it would have made good its claim to have given ethics a new basis and starting-point, since in this way it has bridged over the wide chasm between a merely empirical and a truly scientific system of morality.

Meanwhile, that we have now reached a crisis in morals is sufficiently manifest, I think, to all who take an interest in the larger movements of the time. Be the influence of the theory of evolution

upon ethics what it may, the most vigilant and sagacious thinkers on every side acknowledge that the forces most deeply implicated in the changes that are gradually coming over the whole of our civilisation are carrying us to the verge of a moral interregnum. The supremacy of the older, theologically-derived sanctions of conduct is breaking down; and the danger, immediate and serious, is lest they should be generally cast away as effete and valueless before any other sanctions are established to take their place. At this period of transition, while, as Matthew Arnold put it, "the old is out of date" and "the new is not yet born," the world at large undoubtedly stands in peril of a moral collapse. Half-educated reformers, of more zeal than wisdom, in their anxiety to sweep away every vestige of what they fulminate against as the ancient superstitions of the race, are too apt to overlook the solemn fact, written none the less in letters of fire on every page of history, that the mere destruction of restraints and inspirations under and in virtue of which men have developed hitherto would mean not advance, but chaos. It is well enough to throw aside every husk of old doctrine; but may we not find ourselves sometimes in our careless haste discarding, along with much useless rubbish, some germs of vital truth that the world cannot afford to be without? It is perhaps worth while to pause occa-

<sup>1</sup> C. M. Williams, *A Review of the Systems of Ethics Founded on the Theory of Evolution*, pp. 514, 515.

<sup>2</sup> The case of Lessing is here in point. Writing to his friend Mendelssohn concerning the rationalistic experience of his earlier years, he confesses that in "getting rid of certain prejudices" he had also deprived himself of some things that he would have to recover. "That I have not in part done so already," he adds, "is only due to my fear lest, by degrees, I should drag the whole rubbish into the house again."



sionally to ask ourselves such a question as this; and to remind ourselves that the emotions, upon which, after all, the larger part of morality finally depends, cannot without deadly risk be cut loose from their old moorings and set adrift upon the treacherous sea of chance, at the mercy of every current and squall. Upon the whole, when we remember the congruity that must, according to the evolutionary theory, exist between the creed of a people and their average needs, we cannot protest too vigorously against crude experiments and ill-advised tamperings with the world's heritage of traditions, especially when anything so sacred and essential as the mainsprings of conduct are concerned; we cannot too strongly discountenance the spirit of the rash iconoclast who cares only to sap the ancient foundations of moral faith, and has no principle of guidance to offer in exchange for what he is intent upon snatching away. In such an emergency the clear course is to let the work of destruction take care of itself, and see what can be accomplished in the far more difficult as well as infinitely more important task of reconstructing the bases of morality in accordance with the new thought and the growing knowledge of the time. It is the positive rather than the negative message of science that it concerns us to understand.

Clear recognition of this momentous fact led Spencer, while working out the *Synthetic Philosophy*, to depart from the regular outline as originally published, and to take up the last division—the *Principles of Ethics*—at the expense of several intervening portions of his scheme. In the preface, dated July, 1879, to the *Data of Ethics* (Part I. of the completed

work), he thus wrote in explanation of his course:—

I am the more anxious to indicate in outline, if I cannot complete, this final work, because the establishment of rules of right conduct on a scientific basis is a pressing need. Now that moral injunctions are losing the authority given by their supposed sacred origin, the secularisation of morals is becoming imperative. Few things can happen more disastrous than the decay and death of a regulative system no longer fit, before another and fitter regulative system has grown up to replace it. Most of those who reject the current creed appear to assume that the controlling agency furnished by it may safely be thrown aside, and the vacancy left unfilled by any other controlling agency. Meanwhile, those who defend the current creed allege that, in the absence of the guidance it yields, no guidance can exist: divine commandments they think the only possible guides. Thus, between these extreme opponents there is a certain community. The one holds that the gap left by disappearance of the code of supernatural ethics need not be filled by a code of natural ethics; and the other holds that it cannot be so filled. Both contemplate a vacuum, which the one wishes and the other fears. As the change which promises or threatens to bring about this state, desired or dreaded, is rapidly progressing, those who believe that the vacuum can be filled, and that it must be filled, are called on to do something in pursuance of their belief.\*

This paragraph makes Spencer's position perfectly clear. As before pointed out, his interests had from the first been practical; his earliest publications—the letters on the *Proper Sphere of Government* and the more mature work on *Social Statics*—had dealt with the actual problems of the day; and the desire to apply philosophic principles to the questions of social growth and the conduct of life subsequently inspired the *Synthetic System* itself. Properly speaking, then, all his other work led up to his *Ethics*; to leave that division

\* *Data of Ethics*, p. vi.

untouched, therefore, would have been to leave his whole enterprise, comprehensive and valuable as it might have been as a contribution to the organisation of knowledge, in the condition of "Giotto's tower in the old Tuscan town"—a magnificent effort, yet "wanting still the glory of the spire." "My ultimate purpose," he writes in the preface from which I have just quoted, "lying behind all proximate purposes, has been that of finding for the principles of right and wrong, in conduct at large, a scientific basis." Naturally, therefore, he could not but feel that to allow this purpose to remain unfulfilled, "after making so extensive a preparation for fulfilling it, would be a failure the probability of which" he would not like to contemplate. Hence the persistency with which, amid much interruption from ill-health and some disturbance from other causes, he laboured at this portion of his task, and the satisfaction which he expressed when it was at length brought to completion.

## II.

Properly to appreciate the place occupied by the work of Spencer in the general development of ethical thought, we must understand something of what had been done towards the establishment of a scientific basis of morality by writers who had preceded him in the field. This will bring out his relation to the doctrines of the so-called orthodox schools on the one hand, and to the theories of earlier independent thinkers on the other.

An intrinsic difference in principle has long divided all ethical investigators, no matter what their minor points of agreement or disagreement may be, into two great hostile camps, usually known as the intuitive or intuitional, and the

inductive or utilitarian. This fundamental diversity of view may be traced back dimly to the days of Greek philosophy, but it has acquired its immediate importance only within comparatively recent days. Through Cudworth, Clarke, and Butler on the one side, and through Hobbes, Helvétius, Bentham, and the Mills on the other, we can follow the main lines of divergence and antagonism down to the time when the doctrine of evolution entered the arena, and, offering a hand to each of the hereditary foes, led the way to a conciliation hitherto undreamed of.

The main questions at issue between the intuitionists and the utilitarians, difficult as they may seem in solution, may be very briefly stated. They are the fundamental questions of the ethical standard and the moral sense. What, in the ultimate analysis, is the standard or criterion of right and wrong? And, given that standard, how do we ourselves distinguish between them? Varied in detail as were the answers given by the intuitionists to these questions, they agreed substantially in this—that both the criterion of right and wrong, and our own power of distinguishing between them, are to be sought in an innate and divinely-implanted moral sense or conscience. The human mind was thus regarded as possessing an ultra-experiential faculty of judgment concerning conduct—a faculty which is itself unresolvable into any simpler elements, and beyond which there can be no appeal. Against this view it was the mission of utilitarianism to enter an emphatic protest. The followers of the inductive school refused to accept the alleged innate and divinely-implanted moral sense as anything more than a myth. For them our only test of conduct is the test furnished

by experience of the results of conduct ; and the so-called moral faculty or conscience, so far from being immediate and simple, is itself merely the organised registration in the modern civilised adult of his observations of the consequences of the actions of himself and others. Thus, from the standpoint of the intuitionist, virtue or right conduct is in itself not only a proximate, but also an ultimate, end ; while the utilitarian regards it as a proximate end only ; the ultimate end, which imparts to it its particular quality of virtuousness or rightness, being some kind of utility which it is held to subserve.

This, I think, is sufficiently clear. But as the point is of importance, I will supplement my own statement by a quotation from a distinguished historian who was himself an adherent of the intuitional view. The intuitional moralists, wrote the late Mr. Lecky<sup>1</sup>—

believe that we have a natural power of perceiving that some qualities, such as benevolence, chastity, or veracity, are better than others, and that we ought to cultivate them and repress their opposites. In other words, they contend that, by the constitution of our nature, the notion of right carries with it a feeling of obligation ; that to say a course of conduct is our duty is in itself and apart from all consequences an intelligible and sufficient reason for practising it ; and that we derive the first principles of our duties from intuition.

The utilitarian, on the contrary, denies—

that we have any such natural perception. He maintains that we have by nature absolutely no knowledge of merit and demerit, of the comparative merit of our feelings and actions, and that we derive these notions solely from an observation of the course of life which is conducive to human happiness. That which makes actions good is that they increase the happiness or decrease the pains of mankind. That which constitutes their demerit is their

opposite tendency. To procure the greatest happiness of the greatest number<sup>2</sup> is therefore the highest aim of the moralist—the supreme type and expression of virtue.

These, amid many minor points of difference, not only helping to separate more thoroughly the two great parties from each other, but often breaking up those parties themselves into sundry more or less closely segregated clusters, may be taken as the most salient characteristics of the antagonistic schools. While they remained, in their older forms, the only important candidates for popular favour, the suffrages of the world were very unequally divided between them. Besides the rank and file of the various religious denominations, an overwhelming majority of the most prominent moralists, including practically all those belonging to the Christian Church, strenuously maintained the intuitionist doctrines. The transcendental nature of morality was the central principle around which men of the most diverse theological and social views were called upon to rally ; and the orthodox army, no matter how much its champions might be divided among themselves, thus presented a solid front to the enemy. The other side was never popular ; but it made up for this by attracting to itself some of the clearest-headed and most original thinkers of the

<sup>1</sup> This principle—the greatest-happiness principle, as it is succinctly called—is, of course, that enunciated by Bentham, the man with whose name the system of the older utilitarianism is most intimately associated. It will be found stated and developed in his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, first published in 1789. The principle itself has from that time downward been the object of violent attack at the hands of the intuitional party ; but perhaps the keenest criticism that it has ever been subjected to is that contained in the *Data of Ethics*, chap. xiii.

<sup>2</sup> *History of European Morals*, chap. i.



time, making a special appeal to men of sceptical tendencies, as well as to those trained in scientific methods of investigation.

We need here touch upon those aspects only of the old intuitional-utilitarian controversy which will help us to understand what has been gained by the application of evolutionary principles to ethical theory. A glance at the positions respectively taken up by the two parties on the question of the moral sense will, for this purpose, place us at the proper point of view.

Let us notice, then, that the diversity of moral sentiments and ideas exhibited by different peoples, and by the same peoples at different stages of their growth, is a problem for which the intuitionists have never yet found a satisfactory solution. We are told that there are many religions, but only one morality. This is true in a sense, but not by any means in the sense intended by those by whom the phrase is currently employed. The statement, which indeed smacks suggestively of the attractive humanitarianism of the eighteenth century, might have passed unquestioned at a time when sociological speculation was so entirely untrammelled by any reference to fact that men like Morelly and Rousseau could discourse eloquently of a mythical state of Nature and a purely hypothetical barbarism, and indignantly ask an artificial society to contrast man as the product of civilisation with man in his primitive condition of freedom and happy innocence. But what might have done well enough in Rousseau's day will not do in ours. Progress in ethnological and anthropological research has given us the real savage in place of that creature of "an extinct tribe which never existed"—the savage of our imagina-

tion; and instead of arguing as to what uncivilised man might have been and (in view of our theories) ought to have been, we must now take him, whether we like it or not, as he has been and is. We have to remember that the intuitional doctrine of the moral sense is an inheritance from a period when practically nothing was known of the actual history of our race;<sup>\*</sup> it was constructed in reference to supposed theoretic necessities, and not upon an examination of facts; and it would have been surprising enough, therefore, had it remained unshaken when growing knowledge brought it to the test of reality. Indeed, the only thing for the intuitionist to do is to follow the example of the Italian philosopher who refused to look through a telescope for fear of having his ideas of astronomy upset. An inductive study of the diversities of moral theory and practice, made possible by our modern science of comparative culture, not only destroys at once the old theory of the substantial uniformity of ethical ideals, but even justifies the assertion that there is no crime, recognised by us as such, which has not somewhere and at some time found its place in the catalogue of virtues, and no virtue which has not been officially condemned. Even in extreme cases the statement will be found to hold good. The murderous Fijian's only fear is lest he should not be active enough in slaughter to win the approbation of his gods; with the Egyptian, lying is honourable; the Turkoman's code prescribes theft. Nor when we compare civilised nations with one another do we find the

\* "Inquiring into the pedigree of an idea is not a bad means of roughly estimating its value" (*The Nebular Hypothesis*).

results less significant. Polygamy, wrong in Europe and America, is right and proper in China, India, and Turkey; while infanticide, a practice that we hold in utter abhorrence, was not only common in Greece and Rome, but was even defended by the greatest ethical teachers of antiquity, Plato and Aristotle, who also held views concerning the relations of the sexes which we should look on as revolting. On any theory of a transcendental God-given sense of right and wrong, these facts present difficulties that, but for the overwhelming influence of preconceived ideas, would at once have been recognised as absolutely insuperable. An attempt has indeed been made to turn the edge of the objection by the contention that, notwithstanding such variations of sentiment and conduct, *some* idea of right and wrong is always present. But this assertion practically abandons the only position in the intuitionist theory that is worth fighting for, since, in the first place, it allows the definite and clear-cut claim originally put forth to lapse into one too vague and indefinite to be of any real service; and, in the second place, it introduces the elements of education and environment—the very elements that the intuitionists are naturally most anxious to keep out of the account. If the conscience is, after all that has been said for it, nothing more than a plastic and capricious faculty, which, instead of being a permanent, infallible, and absolute guide, may be so warped and distorted as to prompt here to theft and there to murder, while in other places theft and murder take rank among the most heinous crimes, then what becomes of the divine voice within us? and wherein is the extra-experiential moral sense one whit more sacred than

any sense that might be acquired? Surely the oracles of God should speak with no uncertain sound, if they are to make good their claim to a divine origin and mission.

These difficulties in the intuitionist theory early presented themselves to Spencer, though not till after he had practically committed himself to that theory in his published work. In the division of the *Principles* dealing with the Inductions of Ethics (where the whole ground of moral divergences is covered in considerable detail),<sup>1</sup> he writes:—

Though, as shown in my first work, *Social Statics*, I once espoused the doctrine of the intuitive moralists (at the outset in full, and in later chapters with some implied qualifications), yet it has gradually become clear to me that the qualifications required practically obliterate the doctrine as enunciated by them. It has become clear to me that if, among ourselves, the current belief is that a man who robs and does not repent will be eternally damned, while an accepted proverb among the Bilochs is that "God will not favour a man who does not steal and rob," it is impossible to hold that men have in common an innate perception of right and wrong.<sup>2</sup>

Against the orthodox intuitionists, therefore, the utilitarians undoubtedly possessed a strong case, since the old claim concerning conscience as an extra-experiential element of the mind crumbled to pieces the moment it was brought to the touchstone of fact. But, though the labour of destruction was easy, the labour of construction presented perplexities almost as great as those which the intuitionists had found blocking their path. It was one thing to show that the moral faculty could not be regarded as simple, independent, and transcendental; it was quite another thing to present a tenable

<sup>1</sup> *Principles of Ethics*, Part II.

<sup>2</sup> § 191.

hypothesis of its existence, and of the authoritativeness it undoubtedly possesses in the mind of the average civilised man.

Hence, even in the hands of its ablest exponents, the utilitarian theory remained in a crude and unsatisfactory shape. The problem that it sought to solve, though rightly recognised by it as a problem within the limits of scientific investigation, was for the time being beyond the reach of its resources and power. The conscience is not original and independent: true; but, then, whence and how is it derived? That was the knotty question, to which the intuitionists naturally demanded a reply. Bentham, who, though not theoretically the founder of utilitarianism, first endeavoured to make utility the basis of a coherent moral system, was himself no psychologist, and never approached the problems of ethics from the psychological side; but several of his followers, notably the two Mills, saw this vulnerable spot in his armour, and attempted to make it good. The following extract from the younger of the just-named writers will probably give, in brief, the best specimen of the most advanced utilitarian speculation on this important point:—

The internal sanction of duty, whatever our standard of duty may be, is one and the same—a feeling in our own mind; a pain, more or less intense, attendant on violation of duty, which in properly-cultivated moral natures rises in the more serious cases into shrinking from it as an impossibility. This feeling, when disinterested, and connecting itself with the pure idea of duty, and not with some particular form of it, or with any of the merely accessory circumstances, is the essence of conscience; though in that complex phenomenon as it actually exists the simple fact is in general all incrustated over with collateral associations, derived from sympathy, from love, and still more from fear; from all the forms of religious feeling; from

the recollections of childhood and of all our past life; from self-esteem, desire of the esteem of others, and occasionally even self-abasement. This extreme complication is, I apprehend, the origin of the sort of mystical character which, by a tendency of the human mind of which there are many other examples, is apt to be attributed to the idea of moral obligation, and which leads people to believe that the idea cannot possibly attach itself to any other objects than those which, by a supposed mysterious law, are found in our present experience to excite it. Its binding force, however, consists in the existence of a mass of feeling which must be broken through in order to do what violates our standard of right, and which, if we do nevertheless violate that standard, will probably have to be encountered afterwards in the form of remorse. Whatever theory we have of the nature or origin of conscience, this is what essentially constitutes it.\*

In Mill's view, therefore, as in that of the other members of his school, the moral sense arises in each individual as the result of his own experience of the connection between actions and their consequences, intrinsic and extrinsic, immediate and remote. Observation of the direct and indirect pains entailed by certain evil courses of conduct, which we thus learn to avoid altogether, or to follow at our peril, together with the indelible impressions left by education and various environing influences during our early years, enter as most considerable factors into the building up of the complex moral sense; while an equally important, though more subtle, part is played by the principle of association. Pain and wrong action, pleasure

\* *Utilitarianism*, chap. iii. In their analysis of the conscience the older utilitarians do not seem to have advanced much beyond the point reached by Dr. David Hartley (1705-1757), who introduced into the consideration of the moral sense the important element of association, which he was the first to apply systematically to the general phenomena of the mind.



and right action, are found in interconnection with striking regularity and persistence; whence, in accordance with the well-known psychological law, right and wrong, at first regarded only from the point of view of their consequences, come at length to have a direct power of appeal, and are sought or avoided, loved or hated, for their own sakes. Meanwhile, the abstract idea of rightness and duty is conceived as arising, like other abstract ideas, by generalisation from countless experiences of concrete cases of right and duty; while the sense of coerciveness or obligation at large is interpreted as a result, arising immediately and by association, of the influence exercised upon the growing nature by the rigid discipline and sustained authority of the organised society in which, and the governmental agencies under which, the civilised individual grows to manhood.

Now, it is hardly necessary to point out wherein this alleged explanation, suggestive as it doubtless is, must be regarded as paradoxically insufficient to meet the problem upon its most important side. While recognising to the full the power of education, environment, and association, we still find ourselves unable to understand how, within the lifetime of the single individual, the idea of virtue as a separate, independent, and self-existent conception could ever be generated out of and emerge from the mere personal observation of the persistent connection between certain courses of conduct and certain accompanying results. Serious as is the objection when thus stated, it becomes still more serious when we remember that the specified connection between right action and pleasurable results can scarcely be said to persist within the limits of our own

individual experiences with the constancy and regularity that the argument appears to demand. Could there ever in this way arise such a conception of absolute rectitude as that which Tennyson embodies in the famous lines:

"And because right is right, to follow right  
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence"?\*

Simple or complex, innate or derived, the moral faculty, as we find it in the normal product of civilisation, acts, if not with absolute uniformity, still with an immediateness and average certainty sufficient to make us pause before endorsing any theory that refuses to take us further in the matter than the individual's organised experiences of pleasures and pains. The issue may be dealt with on the grounds of common sense. According to the utilitarian hypothesis, each infant born into the world starts absolutely afresh. The mind is a *tabula rasa*, with no innate ideas, no intuitions of any kind. Upon this the environment is supposed to work; and the simple question is, whether the organisation and registration of personal observations, impressions, and experiences during the comparatively few years of childhood and adolescence can be fairly taken to account for all that we know of the characteristics of the moral faculty as it exists within ourselves in the period of adult life? It is surely not strange that the intuitional school declined to answer this question in the affirmative.

\* It may be pointed out, however, that even this superb declaration of virtue for its own sake does not invalidate the utilitarian *standard*. Those who think it does so must be required to answer the question whether they would hold any line of action to be "wisdom" which does not, at whatever cost of temporary or personal sacrifice, tend to the good of someone, somewhere, at some time.

The dispute between the two opposed theories of morals may, therefore, be said to have reached a deadlock. Each side had found the weak point in the other's system, while at the same time each failed to secure its own from attack. And now we are in a position to appreciate the flood of new light that was suddenly let in upon the whole controversy by the rise of the doctrine of evolution.

Notwithstanding all the profound differences that separated them, the two older schools possessed a single characteristic in common. Both had based their arguments and formulated their conclusions upon the conceptions of special creation and fixed types; and the discussion, with the full consent of both contending parties, had been in this way limited in range to the experiences of the individual life. Could the conscience ever have arisen after the manner alleged, within the span of the separate mortal career? This was the form that the issue had taken; and to the question in this shape one side had answered Yes, and the other No. Evolution at once widened the issue. Behind the individual it placed the race; behind civilised humanity, the ages of barbarism and animality, out of which, through untold centuries, we have been slowly and painfully struggling upward into higher developments of life. The problem was no longer that of explaining the fine sensitive conscience of the modern adult Caucasian as the outgrowth of a few years of personal intercourse with his environment. The gradually-acquired experiences of countless generations, slowly registered through long periods of social consolidation, and handed down from age to age as slight but persistent modifications in the

nervous organisation of evolving man—these were the new factors which the development theory introduced into the discussion. An explanation which had properly been condemned as absurdly inadequate, so long as attention was confined to the brief terms of a separate life, assumed, immediately that account was taken of the element of hereditary transmission, the appearance of a rational and complete solution of the problem. In merging the life history of each single generation in the life history not only of the human race at large, but of all sentient existence, and in postulating the thread of continuity that, running through almost imperceptible gradations, binds the highest forms to the lowest, the evolutionist at once secured a new standpoint, and escaped the obvious charge of extravagance or specious reasoning. In this way evolution, having, as we have already seen, reconciled the adverse claims of the psychological schools of Locke and Kant, now also stepped forward to make peace between the hereditary foes—the intuitionists and the utilitarians. It showed that in the interpretation of conscience each side had part of the truth, and neither side the whole truth. The moral sense, like what we know as instinct, while innate and extra-experiential in the individual, is acquired and dependent in the race.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is only just to notice that the claim for an original and non-derivative moral sense has been very differently interpreted by different members of the older intuitional school. Kant, for instance, by far the greatest thinker among them all, distinctly admits, in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, that the moral imperative, conceived by him as transcendental, is transcendental only as to *form*. The *content* is derived. In other words, it gives the general sense of duty or obligation; but for our knowledge of what constitutes right and wrong in any particular

The attitude of the evolutionary moralist, thus made clear, will be made clearer still by the following extract from a letter written many years ago by Spencer to John Stuart Mill, and subsequently published, in part, in the *Data of Ethics* :—

To make my position fully understood, it seems needful to add that, corresponding to the fundamental propositions of a developed moral science, there have been and still are developing in the race certain fundamental moral intuitions ; and that though these moral intuitions are the results of accumulated experiences of utility, gradually organised and inherited, they have come to be quite independent of conscious experience. Just in the same way that I believe the intuition of space, possessed by any living individual, to have arisen from organised and consolidated experiences of all antecedent individuals who bequeathed to him their slowly developed nervous organisations—just as I believe that this intuition, requiring only to be made definite and complete by personal experiences, has practically become a form of thought, apparently quite independent of experience ; so do I believe that the experiences of utility organised and consolidated through all past generations of the human race have been producing corresponding nervous modifications, which, by continued transmission and accumulation, have become in us certain faculties of moral intuition—certain emotions responding to right and wrong conduct, which have no apparent basis in the individual experiences of utility. I also hold that just as the space intuition responds to the exact demonstrations of geometry, and has its rough conclusions interpreted and verified by them, so will moral intuitions respond to the demonstrations of moral science, and will have their rough conclusions interpreted and verified by them.

Careful perusal of the above extract, while it will enable us to understand Spencer's emphatic protest, made earlier

case we have to still to go back to experience. This, of course, is a far less extravagant demand than that made by the average intuitionist, and, indeed, yields half the case to the utilitarian.

in the same letter, against being classed among the anti-utilitarians, will at the same time indicate those important differences which separate him from the older school, and to which we must revert directly. But, beyond this, it brings us round to a point at which we may touch again upon a question already referred to—the question as to how far it is true that the evolutionary theory has introduced any new elements into our ethical considerations. It will be seen that it has actually discarded neither of the two great contradictory doctrines that it found in possession of the field ; and in that sense, if by new we are to understand something absolutely unconnected with previous investigation, it may be urged that nothing new has been brought to light by its application to the problems of morality. But a new theory in science is seldom like a new fashion in dress ; it is rarely more than a modification, or adaptation, or re-interpretation, of some theory or theories already accepted in whole or in part ; and the revelation, when it comes to shake the world, most frequently brings nothing beyond a new attitude, a fresh adjustment of familiar ideas, or a sudden flash of light into some detail hitherto unperceived. The effect of evolution upon the older moral thought is a case in illustration. It came not so much to destroy as to fulfil. For it has placed the doctrines of both the intuitionists and the utilitarians on a new basis and in a new light ; it has harmonised their differences by showing their partial and supplementary character ; and by promulgating a theory of the moral sense which covers all the facts advanced by both sides, while it avoids the difficulties which each had found insurmountable, it has brought the whole



matter for the first time within the range of scientific treatment.

Nor must we overlook the substantial contribution that evolution has made to the discussion of the perennial problem of evil. The existence of this disturbing factor in the moral universe has, more than any other question, agitated the human mind from the time of Job downward, and with the progress of knowledge and the expansion of thought has given rise, in systems of theology and philosophy, to the most ingenious hypotheses and fantastic speculations. Evolution enables us to read at least some meaning and harmony into the turmoil and discord of the world. Here, again, the explanation it offers us is not marked by any absolute originality. Glimpses of the truth that evil is, so to speak, nothing but the friction due to the imperfect adaptation of human nature to social conditions, have from time to time been caught by thinkers of various schools. But their guesses and conjectures were of no scientific value whatever, and were at most nothing but faint adumbrations of that interpretation which the doctrine of evolution makes possible for us by pointing back over the long past history of our race, and tracing out the struggle of the pre-social instinct with the conditions of social life. The modern doctrine of human development, if it leaves the teleology of the subject still involved in the old mystery (since any question of *why* the particular line of progress brought about by evolution was necessary still remains, from the metaphysical side, entirely unanswerable), at all events replaces by a statement of fact and induction the nebulous theories formerly in vogue. The patristic dogma of the fall of man is banished to the limbo of outgrown superstitions, along

with all the Augustinian subtleties founded upon it; and what we have officially called sin, so far from having any supernatural causes or implications, we can now recognise as an inevitable accompaniment of the slow and painful adjustment of the natures of men to the circumstances and requirements of the associated state. The old Adam within us is the Adam of the pre-social stages of human history—the impulses of barbarism, the unrectified egoistic emotions of the dweller in cave and wilderness, which will from day to day burst loose and declare themselves, despite the long discipline to which mankind has been subjected through centuries of progressing civilisation. Every time we give way to such impulses the old barbarian rises within us, and temporarily reasserts his power. Scratch the Russian, and you will find the Tartar just beneath—so runs the proverb; and in the great mass of men the morality of civilisation is as yet hardly more than skin deep. As with the ship in Ibsen's grim and terrible poem,<sup>1</sup> our modern society carries with it a corpse in the cargo—the unbridled elemental passions, the brute instincts, the fierce anti-social tendencies transmitted to us by our far-off ancestors from the days before society and even humanity began.

What new significance is in this way given to the oft-repeated phrase which describes the criminal classes as the failures of civilisation! They are the representatives of the savage left over in the midst of our more developed life, guided by the savage's predatory

<sup>1</sup> *Rhymed Epistle*—a strange production, based upon the sailor's superstitious dread of making a voyage with a corpse on board, and written in answer to the question of a friend as to what is amiss with the present age.

instincts, living in a state of natural enmity with those about them, preying upon their fellows, to whom they offer nothing in return, and thus remaining unintegrated into the great organisation of mutual-dependent parts which constitutes society. The moral progress of man, as John Fiske epigrammatically put it, is the gradual process of "throwing off the brute inheritance." The law of morality thus becomes more emphatically than ever the law of the higher life; sin is degeneration, atavism, reversion to the pre-social or animal type; and the ethical ideal of evolution, in Tennyson's language, is to

"Move upward, working out the beast,  
And let the ape and tiger die."<sup>2</sup>

### III.

The ethical system of Spencer, then, is hedonistic, or utilitarian, but not in the narrow sense in which the word "utilitarian" was formerly employed. The final criterion, as well as the ultimate end of universal conduct, is still happiness, pleasure, or well-being;<sup>2</sup> and

<sup>2</sup> *In Memoriam*, § 118. Tennyson, in whose poetry the fundamental conception of evolution continually appears, has given expression to the same thought in other places, notably in his later poems, *The Dawn* and *The Making of Man*. Such phrases as "slaves of a four-footed will" and "the ghost of the Brute that is walking and haunting us yet" are vivid poetic renderings of evolutionary ideas.

<sup>2</sup> The tendency of language is almost always towards degeneration, and it is sometimes a hard struggle to prevent our ideas from following our speech. It is unfortunate that the word "pleasure" has come to be generally used for the criterion and end mentioned above. The word is objectionable on account of its connotations; the idea called up is too limited in character, and has been seriously vitiated by evil associations. Happiness, though better, is still not wholly satisfactory. Perhaps "well-being," with its wider sweep of meaning and

in the last analysis that course of action, and that course alone, is held to be right which meets this criterion and helps towards achievement of this end. But while the utilitarianism of Bentham and the Mills was merely empirical or inductive, Spencer's utilitarianism is rational or deductive. We must emphasise this difference if we would appreciate the full value of Spencer's ethical teaching, considered on its scientific side.

All the old moral systems have, as we have already intimated, been uniformly characterised by non-recognition of the principle of causation. Whether the position taken was that the revealed will of Deity is the sole ground of duty (as maintained by the theological moralists strictly so called), or that our knowledge of right and wrong can come only through the instrumentality of a supernaturally-given conscience (as taught by the orthodox intuitionists), or that distinction in conduct arises by governmental enactment (as laid down in the political systems of Hobbes and his disciples), the implication was still the same. All these schools, so widely separated from one another at every other point, agree substantially in this: that they regard the rightness and wrongness of actions as qualities not necessarily inherent in the nature of the actions themselves, but impressed upon them by some extraneous and independent authority. Do we know that a certain action is wrong only because of a divine revelation through Scripture or conscience, or because of legislation directed against it? Then the statement implies that we could learn the wrongness of the said action in no other way—not even by observation of

absence of historic taint, is the best word for the purpose.

its results; and this is tantamount to saying that the action has not, in the nature of things, certain invariable consequences. But this leads us at once into an unforeseen dilemma. For if the supposed wrong action does not tend necessarily to produce certain evil consequences—that is, if its wrongness is not inherent, but accidental—then how are we the better off for knowing that it is wrong? The world might go on its way just as well, so far as present things are concerned, in the absence of the supernaturally-revealed or State-given knowledge, and all need for divine or legislative interference forthwith disappears. But if, on the other hand, the divine or legislative interference is supposed to be required because the welfare of the world will be furthered by the knowledge, then this means, if it means anything, that the evil action does tend to produce certain invariable consequences; and if this is so, then why cannot we study these consequences for ourselves, and reach a knowledge of the wrongness of the action by induction, or deduction, or both? Out of this logical labyrinth there seems no way of escape; and the whole difficulty arises from the fact that the necessary tendency of actions is overlooked—from the fact, in other words, that the element of causation in conduct is left out of the account.<sup>1</sup>

Now, this weakness in older ethical speculations is precisely what the general nature of those speculations, and the intellectual character of the times in which they originated, would lead us to expect. But we are not so fully prepared to find the same weakness, though

not in so pronounced a form, manifesting itself in the doctrines of the utilitarian school. Yet even in utilitarianism recognition of causation is far from complete.

And here we revert to a statement already made: that the older utilitarianism had not advanced beyond the empirical stage in its treatment of moral phenomena. Its method was that of induction only. When observations of the results of various courses of conduct have been made in numerous cases, and with sufficient care, a generalisation is possible, and the inductive statement is reached that certain actions do uniformly give rise to evil results, while certain others bring with them results of an opposite kind. Inferences from such a generalisation may then be taken as rules of conduct; since actions that have been followed by certain consequences in the countless cases submitted to analysis may fairly be supposed to have in themselves a tendency to produce those consequences. But here utilitarianism stopped. The important step in advance taken by Spencer lies in his attempt to convert the principles of conduct thus reached, from truths of the empirical into truths of the rational order, by showing not only that, as inductively proved, certain actions are habitually accompanied by certain results, but also that it may be deductively proved that in the very nature of things these results *must* go along with them. Only in this way can the element of causation be fully recognised; only in this way, therefore, can we have a science of ethics properly so called.<sup>2</sup>

A passage in Spencer's letter to Mill,

<sup>1</sup> The line of argument adopted in this and the following paragraphs is worked out in detail in the *Data of Ethics*, chap. iv.

<sup>2</sup> For Spencer's earliest discussion (interesting in connection with his later arguments) of the utilitarian system, see *Social Statics: Introduction*.



from which we have already quoted, will make the essential point in this discussion sufficiently clear :—

The view for which I contend is, that morality properly so called—the science of right conduct—has for its object to determine *how* and *why* certain modes of conduct are detrimental and certain other modes beneficial. These good and bad results cannot be accidental, but must be necessary consequences of the constitution of things ; and I conceive it to be the business of moral science *to deduce from the laws of life and the conditions of existence what kinds of action necessarily tend to produce happiness and what kinds to produce unhappiness. Having done this, its deductions are to be recognised as laws of conduct ; and are to be conformed to, irrespective of a direct estimation of happiness or misery.*<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps an analogy will most clearly show my meaning. During its early stages planetary astronomy consisted of nothing more than accumulated observations respecting the positions and motions of the sun and planets ; from which accumulated observations it came by and by to be empirically predicted, with an approach to truth, that certain of the heavenly bodies would have certain positions at certain times. But the modern science of planetary astronomy consists of deductions from the law of gravitation—deductions showing why the celestial bodies *necessarily* occupy certain places at certain times. Now the kind of relation which thus exists between ancient and modern astronomy is analogous to the kind of relation which, I conceive, exists between the expediency-morality and moral science properly so called. And the objection which I have to the current utilitarianism is, that it recognises no more developed form of morality—does not see that it has reached but the initial stage of moral science.

Reproducing this passage in the *Data of Ethics*, by way of general summary of his discussion of the utilitarian standpoint, Spencer adds :—

Doubtless, if utilitarians are asked whether it can be by mere chance that this kind of action works evil and that works good, they will answer, No ; they

will admit that such sequences are parts of a necessary order among phenomena. But though this truth is beyond question, and though, if there are causal relations between acts and their results, rules of conduct can become scientific only when they are deduced from these causal relations, there continues to be entire satisfaction with that form of utilitarianism in which these causal relations are practically ignored. It is supposed that in future, as now, utility is to be determined only by observation of results, and that there is no possibility of knowing by deduction from fundamental principles what conduct *must* be detrimental and what conduct *must* be beneficial.<sup>2</sup>

Such, then, is the foundation of Spencer's moral system, to the working out of which through the various departments of personal morals and social relationships the remainder of the *Principles of Ethics* is devoted. It will be seen that, upon the philosophic side, his contribution possesses an importance which it would be difficult to exaggerate, since he has at least pointed the way to a reconstruction of ethical theory upon a naturalistic basis ; has offered an interpretation of moral development which combines what was true in both the older utilitarian and the ordinary intuitional doctrines ; and has pushed beyond mere empirical hedonism to a conception of morality in which right and wrong, while still ultimately resolvable into terms of the bearings of actions upon life, are disengaged from any narrow calculation of results. But while the treatment of the problems of conduct from the standpoint of evolution has thus greatly clarified our theory of morality, the question may still be raised as to whether it has proved of any practical service. Spencer's own reply is contained in the preface to the

<sup>1</sup> *Data of Ethics*, § 21. For a further discussion of the relations between expediency-morality and moral science see the essay on *Prison Ethics*.

<sup>2</sup> The italics are mine.

second volume of the *Principles of Ethics*, and expresses some disappointment:—

The doctrine of evolution has not furnished guidance to the extent I had hoped. Most of the conclusions, drawn empirically, are such as right feelings, enlightened by cultivated intelligence, have already sufficed to establish. Beyond certain general sanctions indirectly referred to in verification, there are only here and there.....conclusions evolutionary in origin that are additional to, or different from, those which are current.

But is this surprising? Certainly not. For apart altogether from the fact that the "right regulation of the actions of so complex a being as man, living under conditions so complex as those presented by a society, evidently forms a subject-matter unlikely to admit of definite conclusions throughout its entire range," the result is one which otherwise we might have been led to expect. The evolution of society has been possible only because little by little the natures of men have been moulded by association into something like conformity with the demands of the social state, and because conduct which makes for well-being has more and more been distinguished as right conduct, receiving the emphasis of those religious, ceremonial, and political codes which have preceded the true moral code, and, by establishing the conditions of harmonious co-operation within the evolving group, have in fact rendered the separate development of that code possible. Hence, the science of ethics, though it may in places correct, qualify, or supplement the principles of conduct otherwise reached, will for the most part only re-state those principles in a somewhat fresh terminology, still further define their bearings, and interpret them more clearly and more emphatically by exhibiting their vital relationships with the evolution of life.

It remains but to add that affiliation of ethical questions upon the general doctrine of evolution leads Spencer to the assertion of some rather striking conclusions concerning the future moral progress of the race. We have seen that one of the fundamental doctrines of the *Synthetic Philosophy* is, that all things are gradually tending towards equilibrium; and as this must hold true in the super-organic no less than in the organic world, it results that the gradual adaptation of the natures of men to their environment cannot cease until between natures and environment a perfect balance has been reached. From the very commencement of social life down to the present time the tendency towards such adjustment has been slowly going on, and it is going on still, moulding the characters of men and women everywhere into more and more complete harmony with the sum-total of the conditions under which they live. What will be the ultimate consequence? "The adaptation of man's nature," Spencer replies,

to the conditions of his existence cannot cease until the internal forces which we know as feelings are in equilibrium with the external forces they encounter. And the establishment of this equilibrium is the arrival at a state of human nature and social organisation such that the individual has no desires but those which may be satisfied without exceeding his proper sphere of action, while society maintains no restraints but those which the individual voluntarily respects. The progressive extension of the liberty of citizens, and the reciprocal removal of political restrictions, are the steps by which we advance towards this state. And the ultimate abolition of all limits to the freedom of each, save those imposed by the like freedom of all, must result from the complete equilibration between man's desires and the conduct necessitated by surrounding conditions.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *First Principles*, § 175.

for him remain manifestations differing in degree, not in kind, from one another; and, like all other phenomena, they have to be traced back into their simplest forms and studied in the light of their slow and gradual evolution.

The first question, therefore, to be raised is the question of the feeling that lies at the heart of them all—the religious emotion. As we cannot consider this, any more than any other faculty of the mind, as extra-experiential and innate in the race, we have to ask, Whence came it? What theory can we advance of its genesis and development?

In seeking an answer to these questions we find our way beset by many obstacles; not because the natural history of the phenomena involved is generically different from the natural history of other mental phenomena, but because it is here especially difficult to make sure that we understand, even approximately, the intellectual condition and outlook of primitive man. It is true that the monstrous and impossible barbarian of eighteenth-century fancy no longer haunts and confuses our speculation; it is true that we do not now wilfully read back wholesale into the savage mind the ideas and emotions that belong to our more developed state; yet, however much we may be on our guard, it is still hard to purge our thought of all trace of our advanced interpretations of things, and confront the universe in the only attitude possible to our distant progenitors in the long ages before the beginnings of civilisation. Till we can do this, however—till we can in a measure leave behind us qualities and tendencies that have become organised into the very woof and texture of our nature—we shall continue to commit the common

mistake of accepting, as original factors brought to light by our investigations, elements which in reality we ourselves have carried into our investigations with us; and this must inevitably, to greater or less degree, vitiate the entire course of our thought. Declining, then, to follow the still fashionable practice of using the more complex mental phenomena to interpret the less complex, we must make up our minds to deal with the whole question, not by analysis from above downward, but by synthesis from below upward.<sup>1</sup>

Much valuable help in this direction has, during the past generation, been given by the careful and systematic study of existing savage tribes. Here, it is true, the difficulties are numerous enough,<sup>2</sup> for the ignorance, short-sighted-

<sup>1</sup> *Principles of Sociology*, i., § 316.

<sup>2</sup> All these are admirably exposed and commented on by Lord Avebury in his *Origin of Civilisation*, chap. i. Later in the same work, dealing specifically with the religious conceptions of savages, he writes: "Most of those who have endeavoured to account for the various superstitions of savage races have done so by crediting them with a much more elaborate system of ideas than they in reality possess. Thus Lafitau supposes that fire was worshipped because it so well represents 'cette suprême intelligence dégagée de la nature, dont la puissance est toujours active.' Again, with reference to idols, he observes that 'la dépendance que nous avons de l'imagination et des sens ne nous permettant pas de voir Dieu autrement qu'en énigme, comme parle Saint Paul, a causé une espèce de nécessité de nous le montrer sous des images sensibles, lesquelles fussent autant de symboles, qui nous élevassent jusqu'à lui, comme le portrait nous remet dans l'idée de celui dont il est la peinture.' Plutarch, again, supposed that the crocodile was worshipped in Egypt because, having no tongue, it was a type of the Deity, who made laws for Nature of his mere will" (chap. vi.). All this is wild enough of a surety; but is it much wilder than a great deal



ness, superficiality, and preconceptions of travellers, upon whom we have almost wholly to rely for our data, combine to render their testimony too often of doubtful worth, and the subjective element will persistently interpose its distorting influence. But the learning and acumen of writers like Tylor and Lubbock have done much towards clearing away our dangers and perplexities, and the conclusions established by them on many important points have enabled us to enter much more fully than was formerly possible into the recesses of the savage mind. This done, it remains for us to hold fast to the fact that the primeval man, whose mental condition and modes of activity we are trying to realise, is not to be thought of as on an intellectual equality with even the lowest of the savage tribes whose life is now to some extent laid open for our study. We may use these as convenient steps in our perilous descent, but we have to get down far below the level of even the wretched Bushmen, Australian aborigines, and Fuegians, before we can commence, by aid of the historic imagination, our investigation of the facts of the primitive human faculty.<sup>1</sup>

In the experiences of creatures, then, who, intellectually and emotionally considered, differed from ourselves so radically and entirely at almost every point that it is only with the utmost difficulty that we can place ourselves provisionally

contained in the new philosophy of early religions offered to the world by Professor Max Müller and his followers among the comparative mythologists?

<sup>1</sup> In the first part of his *Principles of Sociology* Spencer has devoted a great many chapters to an elaborate detailed study of primitive man and his ideas. The works of Dr. E. B. Tylor and Lord Avebury (Sir John Lubbock) should be carefully read in connection with these.

upon their plane and in their attitude of thought, we have to seek for the earliest suggestions of the religious idea. But now, first of all, how for our purpose shall we define the religious idea? Some working definition, if only of the broadest and most rudimentary type, is necessary to begin with, and this definition must pierce far enough to the root of the matter to disentangle the idea itself from all its historic accumulations and developments. Writes Mr. Tylor:—

By requiring in this definition the belief in a Supreme Deity and of judgment after death, the adoration of idols or the practice of sacrifice, or other partially-diffused doctrines or rites, no doubt many tribes may be excluded from the catalogue of religious. But such narrow definition has the fault of identifying religion rather with particular developments than with the deeper motive which underlies them.

For which reason he very properly concludes that "it seems best to fall back at once on this essential source, and simply to claim, as a minimum definition of religion, the belief in spiritual beings."<sup>2</sup> Merely premising that such words as "spiritual" and "supernatural," when employed in this connection, must be held free from all their usual modern connotations, this definition may be accepted as our starting-point. "Belief in a being of the kind we call supernatural," with the feeling of wonder and awe which such belief tends to excite, is, in other words, to be regarded as the source and nucleus of religion. Widely as the countless concrete theological systems of the world may differ one from another, and from the fantastic and incoherent superstitions of savage tribes, in well-nigh every particular, such belief in some form of

<sup>1</sup> *Primitive Culture*, i. 424.

<sup>2</sup> *Ecclesiastical Institutions*, § 534.

existence and manifestation of power other than those which we describe as natural, and the emotions generated thereby, will be found invariably to distinguish and lie at the bottom of them all. It is such belief and feeling that alone furnish a bond of union between bodies of thought otherwise so dissimilar, for example, as nineteenth-century Christianity and East African fetichism; and, as being the residual qualities which fully and partly developed theologies without exception possess in common, they may be taken to represent the protoplasmic germ from which what, in a somewhat more advanced sense, is specifically called religion has everywhere arisen.<sup>1</sup>

Setting out, then, from this conception, we find ourselves confronted by two separate questions. In the first place, whence arose the belief in a mode of existence and power other than our own? And, secondly, given this belief in its crudest form, what was the general course

of its early development? The answers given by Spencer to these questions will be found in his ghost-theory, or theory of the double, and in his doctrine of ancestor worship. All sense of the supernatural, according to his view, may be traced back to the primitive belief in the ghost; and all religious systems whatsoever, arising at the outset from such belief, have passed through the preparatory stage of ancestor-worship on their way to their more complex and highly-developed forms.

## II.

The hypothesis formerly almost universally in vogue among those who sought a natural genesis for religious ideas was that early man was led by a sense of wonder and awe to reverence for, and direct personification of, the natural objects connected with his daily life. Sun, moon, earth, winds, sea, so mysterious in their behaviour, so tremendous in their power and influence, were thus supposed to be the objects which, by heightening of the feelings of astonishment and dread, gradually gave rise to the sentiment that we call worship. But poetical as is the theory, and congruous as its alleged experiences unquestionably are with the mental processes of our more developed state, the briefest consideration of the actual facts of the savage mind suffices to show its entire untenability. The primitive man had neither the emotional nor the intellectual tendencies requisite to produce the supposed chain of effects. The familiar sights and sounds of surrounding Nature, suggestive as they may be to the civilised adult, aroused in him no greater feeling of awe than they do to-day in the child or the village clown, who watches the rising and setting of the sun, the waxing

<sup>1</sup> It may be pointed out that acceptance of this definition changes the issue in the old discussion as to the universality of religion. The discussion itself, from first to last, has been mainly one of terminology, the various disputants not being in agreement with one another, and sometimes indeed not with themselves, in regard to what they meant by the language employed. If we are to use the word "religion" only in some higher sense than that given it in the text, then doubtless Lord Avebury is right in concluding that sundry savage tribes have been and are without religion (*Origin of Civilisation*, chap. vi.). Yet it is very questionable whether any one of the tribes referred to by him in confirmation of his statement would be found entirely lacking in some faint sense of a life-power other than their own. Both Spencer (*Principles of Sociology*, vol. i., § 146) and Dr. Tylor (*Primitive Culture*, i. 425) favour the belief that at all events no tribe that has yet been fairly studied has proved to be absolutely deficient in some trace of religious ideas as thus defined.

and waning of the moon, the ebbing and flowing of the sea, without the slightest impulse in the direction of worship. The religious promptings of which we ourselves are conscious as we stand in the presence of such phenomena are not primitive, but distinctively modern,<sup>1</sup> and, instead of helping, stand as obstacles in the way of our understanding of the emotional attitude of early men. So, too, with the intellectual side of the question. The savage accepts the natural changes that go on around him—day and night, summer and winter, tidal ebb and flow—with complete mental indifference, and as matters of course. He, like the ignorant and brutal among ourselves, has no curiosity. He does not speculate concerning them, he asks no questions about their meaning, seeks for no interpretation. He lacks, therefore, the very traits from which any possible system of Nature-worship would have to originate.

What, then, must we conclude? That Nature-worship is not the primordial form of the religious idea, but a developed form of it. Thus we have to ask—if our study of primitive characteristics, emotional and intellectual, forbids our accepting this commonly alleged explanation as the true one—what theory will that study enable us to offer in its place?

"The mind of the savage," says Spencer, "like the mind of the civilised, proceeds by classing objects and relations with their likes in past experience."<sup>2</sup> But while their minds work in the same way, the experiences which furnish the materials for their mental operations are

entirely different—being in the latter case almost infinitely varied, and in the former extremely few and circumscribed. While, therefore, the civilised adult is able to classify both objects and actions according to their essential likenesses, these being often among the least obvious of their characteristics, conspicuous likenesses, which frequently have nothing whatever to do with essential nature, alone attract the savage attention. A single illustration will make this abstract statement clear. According to testimony cited by Spencer, an Esquimaux has been known to mistake a piece of glass for a lump of ice. This error arose not because the mind of the Esquimaux did not proceed in the same way as the mind of an educated European—namely, by classing the new object with what most resembled it in past experience—but because, owing to his small and superficial acquaintance with things, this rough grouping of objects, in virtue of their most manifest external similarities, was the only grouping possible to him.

Passing over the discussion of the general theory of the outer world to which these limitations must necessarily give rise, we will concern ourselves with their influence only in the production of the earliest religious ideas. Consider, then, the interpretation that must be forced upon the mind of primitive man by the familiar personal phenomena of shadows, reflections, dreams. The notion inevitably suggested by them must be the notion of the duality of things. Watching his shadow, the savage becomes convinced that he is attended by a double, sometimes present, sometimes withdrawn. Observation of his reflection in the water strengthens this belief; and in both cases he finds

<sup>1</sup> Any sense of a spiritual relation with Nature is, as the study of literature shows us, of very recent development.

<sup>2</sup> *Principles of Sociology*, i., § 52.



evidence of the duplication not only of his own existence, but of almost all other existences as well. Knowing nothing of the physical causes of these results, he simply and naturally regards them as appended entities—which, however, possess the differential characteristic that they are visible without being tangible.\* Hence the initial peculiarities of the double, or shadow, world. With these crude ideas combine ideas arising from the experiences of sleep. In dreams the savage finds himself engaged in activities similar to those of waking life. He hunts, fishes, and feasts, fights enemies, and goes through dangers; and these visionary occurrences are to him just as real as the every-day occurrences which they faintly or vividly resemble. What is the inevitable result? While all these dream-adventures have been taking place, his actual body, as he by-and-by learns from others, has been lying motionless and unresponsive. From this grows up the notion of the wandering double, or other-self, that goes away for a short time in dreams, and for longer periods in fevers, swoonings, and trances; and the identification of this other self with the appended entity, shown in shadow and reflection, is almost certain to follow. In this way develops in complete form the belief in the double or ghost—a belief which the testimony of travellers and missionaries, so far as it has hitherto been carefully sifted and examined, reveals as existing even in savage tribes among whom the

faintest trace or suggestion of any higher religious conception has been looked for in vain.

This belief naturally assumes special proportions in connection with the phenomenon of death. Temporarily withdrawn in sleep, fever, swoon, and trance, the double, or other self, is held at dissolution to take a final departure. Yet, though now permanently detached from the tangible bodily self, to which no effort can recall it, it has not therefore passed into a state of absolute non-existence. It has vanished into the shadow-world, carrying with it most of its earthly characteristics, but becoming gradually endowed none the less with growing suggestions of superadded power. By-and-by the surrounding world is filled with these shadowy doubles—the belief in ghosts thus generated surviving down to our own time in the vulgar dread of dematerialised existences that are supposed to haunt “the glimpses of the moon, making night hideous.”

Observe the natural result. A savage dreams of his dead father, brother, son. How does he interpret such an experience? As the actual visitation of the double or ghost of his departed relative. No other interpretation is, indeed, possible. Out of this springs the first idea of an after-life. But this after-life, as Lord Avebury has pointed out, is at the outset limited and temporary; savages are likely to dream, for the most part, only of the recently dead; and when a deceased friend is no longer dreamed about, he is no longer thought of as still existing.<sup>1</sup> Only later, along with the

\* Chamisso's well-known story of Peter Schlemihl—the man who sold his shadow—and Lamotte-Fouqué's *Saint Sylvester's Night Phantasy*, in which a person loses his reflection, are playful reminiscences of this primitive belief in the actual reality of shadows and reflections.

<sup>1</sup> “Ask the negro,” says M. Du Chaillu, “where is the spirit of his great-grandfather? He says he does not know; it is done. Ask him about the spirit of his father or brother who

development of larger religious ideas, does this conception of the temporary after-life expand into the conception of unending after-life, or immortality.

But, meanwhile, belief in the surviving double, or ghost, exercises remarkable influence over the whole of savage life. It originates, in the first place, the practice of ministering to the needs and desires of the spirit. The universal rite of leaving provisions with the corpse finds its explanation here; sometimes, where the double is thought of as material, it is supposed to make use of such provisions in their material form; sometimes the more refined conception is that the ghost makes use only of the spirit of the things offered. Reason is thus also assigned for those continued periodical oblations to the dead of which travellers in different parts of the world have spoken, and which frequently persist, in more or less mutilated shapes, in the higher stages of advancing civilisation. But this is by no means all. In these primitive observances we may recognise the germ of all religious ceremonial. The father of the family, the leader of the tribe, the chief of the clan—men of exceptional prowess and power during life—become after death the objects of special attention. Their utterances in dreams are accepted as

died yesterday, then he is full of fear and terror; he believes it to be generally near the place where the body has been buried, and among many tribes the village is removed immediately after the death of one of the inhabitants." The same belief prevails among the Amazula Kafirs, as has been well shown by Mr. Callaway. They believe that the spirits of their deceased fathers and brothers still live, because they appear in dreams; by inverse reasoning, however, grandfathers are generally regarded as having ceased to exist.—Lord Avebury, *Origin of Civilisation*, pp. 238, 239.

commands of unusual importance; their known wishes become the foundations of law; everything is done to retain their favour and to keep them friendly. Hence arises ancestor-worship as a necessary stage in religious evolution. Little by little, along with social consolidation, goes consolidation of these incipient religious ideas. The tribe is dominated by some one man of extraordinary strength and character; success in war attends his guidance, success within the clan follows his counsel. Dying, he assumes a correspondingly important position in the ghost-world—his spirit becomes the tribal god. His grave, and the rough structure raised around it for protection, initiate the temple; ministrations at his resting-place and propitiatory offerings upon the ever-sacred spot give rise to religious sacrifice; appeals to him for continued help are the first prayers; and in the praises of his great deeds, his courage, and his triumphs, recited or chanted within hearing of and to gratify his ghost, we may find the first indications of subsequent temple ritual.

To show how from these germs, *pari passu* with the expansion of thought and the general evolution of the social structure, there gradually grew up systems of fetichism, idolatry, Nature-worship, and other primitive bodies of theological thought, with their accompanying cults; and still more to trace from these the slow formation, in their first crude embodiments, of the great concrete religions of the world, would here take us beyond our limits. All this Spencer has done in detail, and with wonderful wealth of illustration. The following points are those which we have here to bear in mind. First, that our present method of interpretation seeks the origin of all

religious ideas, not, according to the common mythological theory, in feelings and speculations about the powers of Nature which are obviously beyond the range of undeveloped thought, but in the savage's inevitable experiences of the duality of his own and other existence; and that, consequently, all so-called primitive religious ideas are really not original, but derived. Secondly, that the immediate and necessary outgrowth of these experiences was the rise of a universal system of ancestor-worship, which in time originated a more or less complex pantheon of deities—ancestors expanding into gods, and mighty rulers and leaders into gods-in-chief. Thirdly, that all forms of theism, even monotheism itself, are reached by generalisation from earlier ideas, and are only possible when the mind has attained a certain degree of development. And, finally, that the course of evolution here indicated is to be held as marking out the line pursued by every religious system in its earliest stages—in other words, that we see no reason to regard any religion whatever as an exception to this general rule, because in its purified and highly elaborated form it may present no vestigial reminiscences of these primitive stages of its history.

### III.

Acceptance of the doctrine of evolution in its application to thought obliges us to acknowledge that in the development of religious, as of all other ideas, there must at every stage be a certain congruity between the beliefs held and the intellectual and moral character of those holding them. If it be true, as has been pertinently said, that "an honest God's the noblest work of man," it is no less true that this noblest work

is only possible to noble natures in a comparatively advanced state of civilisation. An indigenous creed will always evolve in conformity with the average needs of a nation or tribe at any given time, and the changes it gradually undergoes—allowance being made for the subtle influence of interaction between belief and character—will be in keeping with the changing needs; while where a creed is imported ready-made from without it will inevitably, in so far as it enters into the spiritual life at all, find the level of general character and ideals—a truth never more strikingly illustrated than in the history of proselytising Christianity. And this forces us to recognition of the fact, not altogether easy of acceptance throughout the whole range of its implications, that "the religious creeds through which mankind successively pass are, during the eras in which they are severally held, the best that could be held; and that this is true not only of the latest and most refined creeds, but of all, even to the earliest and most gross."

This principle becomes clearer when we remember that early creeds are everywhere closely fashioned upon the existing social state; and since the social state is at every stage of its evolution the outgrowth of average needs, the creed itself is but the idealisation and embodiment of those needs, and throws the weight of its influence where for the time being it is most required. A religious conception greatly beyond the medium social demand would also be beyond the reach of the medium intelligence; though possible to one or two in a generation, it would be impossible to the large majority. Hence, the ideas

• "The Use of Anthropomorphism."



formed of divine affairs and divine government are at all times reflections of earthly affairs and earthly government: the divine ideal, in other words, is simply the projection of the particular social ideal then in vogue. Man has all along made God in his own image; and more civilised periods, inheriting the conceptions handed down to them from periods less civilised, find themselves entrusted with the task of modifying these older conceptions to bring them into general harmony with broader and purer ideals. "Ascribed characters of deities," as Spencer says, "are continually adapted and readapted to the needs of the social state. During the militant phase of activity the chief god is conceived as holding insubordination the greatest crime"—as it is then politically considered the greatest offence; he is commonly regarded

as implacable in anger, as merciless in punishment; and any alleged attributes of milder kinds occupy but small space in the social consciousness. But where militancy declines, and the harsh, despotic form of government appropriate to it is gradually qualified by the form appropriate to industrialism, the foreground of the religious consciousness is increasingly filled with those ascribed traits of the divine nature which are congruous with the ethics of peace: divine love, divine forgiveness, divine mercy, are now the characteristics enlarged upon.<sup>1</sup>

That all early religious conceptions are absolutely anthropomorphic, both in their positive aspects and in their limitations, is now admitted by all students of culture history; and we may here notice, in passing, the striking harmony of this fact with the general theory of ancestor-worship above outlined. Man was not only the primitive

type of deity, as Dr. Tylor has said; he was the primitive deity; hence necessarily the purely manlike characteristics of all early gods. At first scarcely more intelligent, far-seeing, courageous, or potent than the living savage who ministered to his necessities, the surviving double or ghost only gradually acquired transcendent capacities and powers; even the Jahveh of comparatively speaking so advanced a people as the early Hebrews being for a protracted period still markedly deficient not only in the higher virtues, but also in the higher intellectual qualities. Monotheism, or the conception of a single, all-powerful, ever-present deity, therefore comes at the far end of the evolution of religious ideas; which means, of course, that many popular theological theories, based upon the assumption of man's innate sense of the divine, require fundamental modification.

But what we are most concerned to point out here is that, as Spencer has shown in the little essay on "The Use of Anthropomorphism," from which we have already quoted, anthropomorphism, even in its crudest and grossest forms, has had its relative justification, since it has played an important part in the higher development of the race. The savage nature, needing strong checks, can most effectually be controlled by fear of the still more savage deity. The conception must be entirely concrete to enter as a moral motive into his action; and thus even the most repulsively diabolical characteristics aid in the production and preservation of restraints, which, not otherwise obtainable, help, like the iron hand and will of the earthly despot, to prepare the way for milder discipline. Something may in this way, therefore, be said even for what Oliver Wendell Holmes called the "diabology"

<sup>1</sup> *Ecclesiastical Institutions* (*Principles of Sociology*, Part VI.), § 656.

of mediæval theology, and much for many of the harsher elements in the popular religious teachings of our own day. They yield important regulative factors in the lives of those for whom restraints and sanctions derived from more abstract doctrines would have no authority; and they could not be universally swept away, even if that were possible, without the most disastrous results. The only danger is that, through the influence of natural religious conservatism and intellectual vested interests, the old conceptions may survive the period of their beneficial activity. Then they become not aids, but hindrances, to further progress—obstacles in the way of that adjustment to which all evolution tends.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Recognition of the average congruity between men's beliefs and their needs must not blind us to the fact that all lower religious ideas are extremely tenacious of life, and tend to persist, with untold influences for evil, in face of advancing civilisation. The task of eliminating the worst features in the body of theological doctrine remaining over from the past is, in some respects, the most important that each generation has to undertake; and how difficult it generally proves is shown by the ever-renewed struggle between so-called heterodoxy and so-called orthodoxy, trials for heresy, and other similar phenomena. It seems to me that Spencer himself was inclined to overlook or underrate this dynamic aspect of the matter, as he was unquestionably inclined to overlook or underrate the dynamic aspect of social evolution in general. Meanwhile there is another thought that may be pertinently suggested. We speak too often of civilisation as if it were a tide rising with something like uniformity all along the shore. We forget that in every country, at every period, stages of civilisation overlap—that there are still to be found among ourselves representatives of every epoch in the world's history, from the age of barbarism down to our own time. Appreciation of this fact should prevent a confusion of issues which, sometimes overtly, sometimes in partly disguised form, will be found to vitiate

## IV.

The principle that anthropomorphism lies at the root of all early religious conceptions, interesting as it is for students of culture-history, is here referred to not for its own sake, but for its important implications in relation to the higher progress of theology. For the fact now to be recognised is, that even the most advanced theological systems of the world have not yet fully outgrown this earliest universal stage. Modern Christian theism itself, even in its purest forms, is still anthropomorphic theism—is still substantially an attempt to construct a philosophy of deity on the

most discussions on present-day religious affairs. It is too often assumed to be an objection against a high religious creed that it is not applicable to every class of the community, and particularly that it does not go straight home with regenerating force to the lowest and most degraded characters. Hence, comparisons are instituted in all solemnity between the more refined faith of cultivated thinkers and the grosser of certain evangelical schools, and in favour of the latter, because they are every- in reaching some whom the needs are every- in question have never been upon the existing that needs to be said in the social state ordinary argument is that even in the midst of development the evolution the must have its corresponding creed, the creed but that we object to regard as embodied that morally prove the most influential the certain cases as therefore possessing the the essential religious vitality. The counterpart the common error now referred to—an error repeated in many circles with offensive implications—is the scarcely less widely-spread tendency of well-meaning and cultivated men and women to believe in the amelioration of the lowest classes through immediate contact with high religious ideas that properly belong only to the intellectual and moral level of far more developed natures. We can never reiterate too strongly that, in the nature of things, no creed can resemble a patent medicine and suit all cases.

basis of human qualities and human powers.

The history of the slow and painful advance of theology from lower to higher forms has been throughout the history of gradual de-anthropomorphisation.<sup>1</sup> One by one the distinctively manlike characteristics have been dropped from the conception of God, and those remaining have been expanded to more than manlike proportions. These changes, it is almost needless to say, have corresponded with the progress of men towards higher social and individual ideals, and thus we find, as we should expect, that the passions and proclivities first winnowed out and repudiated are those which belong to the stages of barbarism now left behind. The savage trait of cannibalism does not, in the conception of the god, long survive the habit of cannibalism in any tribe, and deception, fraud, and cruelty do not continue to be predicated of deity when truthfulness and mercy come to be recognised as qualities appertaining to higher manhood. "Our doctrinal *gods*," wrote Dr. Holmes, "are un-*like* the Deity of the Westminster Catechism, and trying to model a new deity with more of modern humanity, and less of ancient barbarism, in his position." At the same time, the limitations of human faculty are set down in the image formed of the Divine Being. God is thought of no longer only as very powerful, very far-seeing, very good, but as powerful, far-seeing, good, in degrees altogether transcending human possibility—and finally as infinitely so. And now

observe that, as each new step in advance is taken, as one by one the imperfect moral qualities are allowed to lapse, and the conception is ennobled and expanded on every side, every generation looks down upon those who continue to cling to the outgrown ideas with feelings of astonishment, or pity, or disgust. The Christian theist is horrified at the suggestion of the cannibal deity of the Fijians; the modern defender of orthodoxy finds much that is repulsive with little that is admirable in the despotic and tyrannical God of mediæval theology; yet, throughout, the conception is that of idealised humanity. Even in the very loftiest theological teachings this still holds true. The moral qualities are infinitely purified—the intellectual qualities infinitely developed; but the difference is one of degree only, and not of kind. The qualities are human qualities still.

But must we rest here? Is anthropomorphic theism, even in its ultimate form, the final outcome of the religious idea? Is man, too long accepted by himself as *πάντων μέτρον*, the measure of all things, to set himself up permanently as the type of Deity? Or may we not rather suppose, looking back over the course of religious evolution in the past, and humbly acknowledging the possibility of continued evolution in the future, that mankind may still reach conceptions of the Absolute Reality as much higher and purer and nobler than the now current conceptions of Deity, as these in their turn are higher and purer and nobler than the superstitions of the savage?—that the purgation of the merely human characteristics may still continue, till at length all thought of the manlike shall be entirely banished from our idea of God?—that, in other words,

<sup>1</sup> For this useful, if somewhat formidable-looking, word we are indebted to the late John Fiske.



anthropomorphic theism, when brought to its highest degree of purification, may yet lead the way to religious ideas compared with which all thoughts of Deity that men have hitherto entertained will seem crude and gross?<sup>2</sup>

We shall best approach these questions from the negative side—by considering first of all the impossibility of continuing to think of the noumenal existence in any terms of human existence, no matter how high and pure these may be.

Theologians, metaphysicians, and all those who have in any way concerned themselves with the ultimate problem of the universe, have agreed to define the First Cause of all things as both infinite and absolute. To this, indeed, they are driven, to avoid becoming entangled in meshes of difficulty and self-contradiction from which there is no escape. But, as a matter of fact, they escape Scylla only to fall into Charybdis. Verbally intelligible though their proposition may appear, it becomes totally unintelligible the moment we press close upon the meanings of the words employed, and endeavour to frame conceptions answering to the phraseology. For, in the first place, how can we think of an absolute cause? Absolute is that which exists out of all relation; while a cause can only be conceived as such in relation to its effect. Cancel the thought of effect, and you cancel the thought of cause. To speak of absolute cause, therefore, is

to attempt to unite the ideas of non-relative and relative—which is manifestly an impossibility. "We attempt," wrote Dean Mansel, whose arguments on this question were freely drawn upon by Spencer, and are here reproduced from the pages of *First Principles*,

to escape from this apparent contradiction by introducing the idea of succession in time. The Absolute exists of itself, and afterwards becomes a Cause. But here we are checked by the third conception, that of the Infinite. How can the Infinite become that which it was not from the first? If causation is a possible mode of existence, that which exists without causing is not infinite; that which becomes a cause has passed beyond its former limits.<sup>3</sup>

To pursue this subject further would be to commit ourselves to an unwarrantable digression into the domain of metaphysics. Observing simply that, as here shown, while it is impossible to think of the First Cause as finite and relative, it is equally impossible to frame any conception of it as infinite and absolute, we will pass on to notice that, even waiving these insuperable difficulties, others not less formidable stare us in the face. A large part of dogmatic theology is taken up with the discussion of the "attributes" of God. Yet it is easy to show not only that the various attributes so confidently ascribed to Deity are mutually destructive, and therefore cannot possibly be thought of together, but also that the conception of none of them can be made to combine with the conceptions of infinite and absolute, which for the sake of the argument we will consent for the moment to accept.

The question of the relation of God's "moral character" to his knowledge and his power introduces us to a familiar

<sup>2</sup> No student of early religious thought can afford to overlook Browning's wonderfully subtle analysis of anthropomorphism in his *Caliban upon Setebos*. Perhaps the only needful commentary upon this extraordinary production is the motto which the poet himself chose for it from the Psalms, and which sufficiently indicates his point of view:—"Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself."

<sup>3</sup> *Limits of Religious Thought*, quoted in *First Principles*, § 13.

dilemma of old standing. We can think of a man as being at once very good and very wise and very powerful; but when we attempt to carry these qualities to an infinite degree, and at the same time bear in mind the actual history and condition of the world, we find ourselves entangled in a problem that has already shaken so many noble minds. Evil and suffering exist; they belong, so far as we can see, to the very texture of universal life; and even under the hands of the rhapsodical Mr. Drummond, the history of the evolution of life remains a history of wholesale carnage and cruelty. Now, God must have foreseen all this before the creation of the world, or he cannot be omniscient. But if he foresaw it, he must have been able or not able to prevent it. In the former case, though all-powerful, he cannot be all-good; in the latter, though all-good, he cannot be all-powerful. To think of God, then, as at once all-wise, all-powerful, and all-good is clearly an impossibility. Here is the ancient stumbling-block—the ever-recurring problem which no amount of inquiry into the “purposes of the Creator” has ever yet enabled or ever will enable theology to meet with a satisfactory solution. To reconcile the sin and misery of the world with the infinite power, goodness, and wisdom of a Deity conceived in terms of human powers and feelings, remains to-day, as it has been from the first ages of monotheism, one of the great unread and unreadable enigmas of speculation. Here we hand it back to the theologians, who have made it their own by pre-emption, and who are indeed responsible for its existence. *Non nostrum tantas componere lites.*

For the whole difficulty, let it be understood, is not, as is too often assumed,

a difficulty created by the blasphemous cavilling of those who refuse to accept, in lieu of explanation, the verbal jugglery of metaphysical special pleading. It inheres in the very nature of anthropomorphic theism; and if blasphemy there be in the matter, the charge lies, as John Fiske very properly pointed out, at the door of those who seek to maintain the anthropomorphic hypothesis. Hence the gain achieved by showing that this hypothesis is untenable. To do this we have to prove that, as above stated, beyond the fact that we cannot combine the ideas of infinite goodness, power, and wisdom in our conception of Deity, lies the further (less obvious but more significant) fact, that no “attribute” whatsoever can possibly be thought of in connection with Absolute and Infinite Existence.

To define God is to deny him, said Spinoza; and the veriest tyro in logic knows that definition involves circumscription. Yet upon definition have theologians from time immemorial expended their subtlest powers, with the result that they have succeeded in producing, in Matthew Arnold’s famous phrase, nothing but a non-natural, magnified man. For their definitions are verbal only—they elude us the instant we endeavour to turn them into thought. We are told, for instance, that God is an Infinite Personality. But if we cannot think of an infinite cause, still more clear is it that we cannot think of an infinite personality. Personality implies limitation, or it means nothing at all. To talk of an Infinite Person, therefore, is to talk of something that is at once infinite and finite, unconditioned and conditioned, unlimited and limited—an impossibility. So is it with every quality related to personality. Theology

argues about the will and the purpose of God. Mathematics, as Spinoza long ago protested, might as well discuss the circularity of a triangle. Will and purpose are attributes of the limited and conditioned; they imply an end external to the agent, and a desire on his part to accomplish it. Attempt to attach these ideas to the idea of the Absolute and Infinite, and you will find yourself plunged into a bottomless sea of absurdity. How can there be an end external to the Absolute? and how can the Infinite pass through states of consciousness, constituting the act of volition? Even intelligence or consciousness itself is conceivable only as a relation, and therefore the Absolute cannot be thought of as conscious. Intelligence demands

a conscious subject and an object of which he is conscious. The subject is a subject to the object; the object is an object to the subject; and neither can exist by itself as the absolute. This difficulty..... may be for the moment evaded by distinguishing between the absolute as related to another and the absolute as related to itself. The absolute, it may be said, may possibly be conscious, provided it is only conscious of itself. But this alternative is, in ultimate analysis, no less self-destructive than the other. For the object of consciousness, whether a mode of the subject's existence or not, is either created in and by the act of consciousness, or has an existence independent of it. In the former case the object depends upon the subject, and the subject alone is the true absolute. In the latter case the subject depends upon the object, and the object alone is the true absolute. Or, if we attempt a third hypothesis, and maintain that each exists independently of the other, we have no absolute at all, but only a pair of relatives; for coexistence, whether in consciousness or not, is itself a relation.<sup>1</sup>

Or, to put the matter in language elsewhere employed by Spencer himself,

"intelligence, as alone conceivable by us, presupposes existence independent of it and objective to it.....To speak of an intelligence which exists in the absence of such alien activities is to use a meaningless word." Hence, the intelligence ascribed to the Absolute Being "answers in no respect to that which we know by the name. It is intelligence out of which all the characters constituting it have vanished."<sup>2</sup>

The fundamental assumptions of rationalistic theology are thus, as Dean Mansel concludes, self-destructive. Turn where we will, choose our vocabulary as we may, we must inevitably commit ourselves to endless confusion, so long as we rest in even the highest and purest forms of anthropomorphic theism—so long, that is, as we persist in thinking of the ultimate reality that religion calls God as a *quasi*-human entity, and deceive ourselves into believing that we are gaining anything like a truer and deeper understanding of his nature by ascribing to the Infinite and Absolute Existence qualities and attributes that can have no possible meaning when taken out of connection with the finite and conditioned. Hence it is evident that the further progress of thought "must force men hereafter to drop the higher anthropomorphic characters given to the First Cause, as they have long since dropped the lower."<sup>3</sup>

It is only necessary to add to this part of the argument that the impossibility, thus made apparent, of defining the ultimate reality in terms of human activities means, of course, the impossibility of defining the ultimate reality in any terms at all. Humanity furnishes us with our highest conception of life.

<sup>1</sup> Mansel, quoted in *First Principles*, § 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Ecclesiastical Institutions*, § 658.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



That the infinite universe contains forms of existence transcending ours in inconceivable ways and in almost infinite degrees is, beyond question, a rational supposition; but any attempt to image such superior forms must still be circumscribed by what we know of intelligence in the highest manifestations in which it has yet been revealed to us. We cannot in the nature of things get rid of our own limitations; wander where it will, our imagination must still be tethered fast to our own conditions. If, then, passing from the thought of transcendently superior phenomenal existences, which as phenomenal must have a certain kinship with ourselves, to the thought of the noumenal existence, which as noumenal can possess none of the characteristics of the phenomenal, we find inevitably that our human nature furnishes us with no kind of standard, criterion, or point of departure; we are bound to realise that no standard, criterion, or point of departure is possible to us. If the highest that we know leaves us without help in our effort to conceive that which an infinitely superior phenomenal intelligence would still be as far from apprehending as ourselves, then it is clear that the enterprise itself has to be relinquished. And thus, by noting the failure which must of necessity follow every attempt to frame a conception of the ultimate reality, we are led round to the great truth made clear the moment we recognise the relativity of all our thinking—the truth, namely, that all conception of Absolute Being is for ever beyond our grasp.

#### V.

Here, then, we have established certain negative conclusions. We have seen, in the first place, that, according to the doctrine of evolution, we cannot regard

man as possessing an innate, transcendental sense of Deity, and that we must, therefore, seek a natural genesis for religious as for all other ideas. One current hypothesis is thus overthrown. In the second place, we have found that the progress of religious thought has largely consisted in the gradual elimination of anthropomorphic elements from the idea of Deity, and that this elimination must go on until all human or *quasi*-human attributes are entirely expunged. Accepted theological teachings in regard to the personality and character of God are thus shown to belong to a lower stage of religious thought—a stage already partly, and presently to be entirely, outgrown.

But, fortunately, we do not have to rest in these emphatic repudiations of so much that seems most sacred in our modern heritage of thought. There is a positive as well as a negative aspect to our whole argument—a constructive as well as destructive side. To this we will now turn.

That larger charity, which is one of the most striking results of evolutionary habits of inquiry, has taught us to recognise not only “the soul of goodness in things evil,” but also the soul of truth in things erroneous. We no longer discard as absolutely and entirely without foundation even the strangest and most grotesque ideas that have ever gained foothold in the thoughts of our race. Absurd as they may seem to the superficial or careless observer, the mere fact that they have existed and have held their own may be taken to prove that they originally “germinated out of actual experiences—originally contained, and perhaps still contain, some small amount of verity.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *First Principles*, § 1.

If this is true in regard to beliefs in general, especially must it be held to be true in regard to such beliefs as have given evidence of unusual and persistent vitality. It was a cheerful doctrine of the old theology that if a thing were pleasant it was, therefore, certain to be wrong; whence, by analogy, it might be assumed that the more widespread an idea, the less chance there would be of its embodying any nucleus of reality. But, from the standpoint here adopted, this atrabilious supposition is shown to lack foundation. For, when any belief has become deeply embedded in human nature, when it resists modifications of fashion and thought, and holds its ground in perennial strength amid all the intellectual and moral upheavals of the ages, we see reason to infer that it does so because, whatever may be its encumbrances and adulterations of error, it contains some core of essential truth. Now, suppose that, recognising this trait of universality and persistency in a given belief as *prima facie* evidence of its possessing a strong basis of verity, we observe that it is not only very general and very stable, but also that it is a constituent element common to many otherwise conflicting systems of thought—what is the inference that we are compelled to draw? The inference, surely, that, generated among different men under almost infinitely varied conditions, caught up by and preserved in creeds and philosophies having scarcely another point of similarity, and enduring amid the most sweeping changes and far-reaching developments of thought, this belief must hold some kernel of truth of supreme importance—must shoot out some tendrils running far down into the deepest subsoil of human life and experience.

Bearing this in mind, we may revert to a point already dealt with. In seeking for the broadest possible definition of the religious idea, we concluded that in the last analysis that idea would everywhere be found to depend upon the sense of an existence other than the existence which we describe as natural. Belief in a mode of life and power other than our own—in a “something not ourselves,” the influence of which is none the less felt through all our existence—is, therefore, the central belief around which all concrete forms of religion have gradually accumulated; it is the belief which all such concrete forms, whatever may be the diverse courses of their evolutions, continue to hold in common; it is the residual element left when all their differences are cancelled and all their antagonistic factors thrown aside. Almost if not quite universal, and obstinately persistent, it is therefore the belief that, however much it may be distorted or disguised, must be taken as embodying the largest and most important truth. Now, all religious systems have built upon the foundation furnished by this belief a theory of explanation—a philosophy—of the universe; recognising one and all, from lowest to highest, that a mystery lies at the heart of things—a mystery from the overwhelming sense of which there is no possibility of escape. And what, in regard to this universal recognition of the problem of the universe, has been the course of the evolution of religious thought? Every stage in advance has only served to bring the sense of mystery into more conspicuous relief. Earlier interpretations, shown by wider knowledge and larger outlook to be insufficient, are discarded or modified; hypotheses framed by one generation are seen by the next generation to be

untenable; until at length the inevitable goal of the whole movement comes within sight, and the most thoughtful inquirers begin to realise that the mystery of which all the creeds have sought an explanation is a mystery for which no explanation can ever possibly be found. Thus, however much religious systems may differ from one another in their suggested solutions of the problem of life, and from that most developed philosophy which, conscious that every hypothesis that ever has been or ever can be framed concerning it is untenable, declares the problem itself to be insoluble, they are at one upon the supreme point, that the mystery is there. This is a truth "respecting which there is a latent agreement among all mankind, from the fetich-worshipper to the most stoical critic of human creeds."<sup>\*</sup>

In endeavouring to trace the natural history of the religious idea we throw no discredit, then, upon that idea in its higher developments, any more than we throw discredit upon the moral idea in its higher developments by following that down to its crudest forms. We recognise, of course, that man in the beginning was potentially religious, as he was potentially intelligent, and potentially moral. Given this potentiality, our business is simply with the *growth* of the religious idea; in studying which we find, in all its changes and ramifications, some vital germ of truth. Here, as in the case of the moral sense, it is difficult to see what advantage the advocates of supernatural origin can possibly claim over those against whose theories of a natural origin they so fiercely protest. Indeed, the advantage is rather on the other side, since, as Dr. Fairbairn has

pointed out, the supernaturalistic theory implies that man must have had what Schelling called "an original atheism of consciousness."

Thus we have two permanent elements in religious thought: the belief in a mode of life and power other than our own, and a sense of the ultimate mystery of the universe; the former of them being used as a key to the latter. We have seen that the inevitable tendency of religious development is to make this mystery more apparent. Let us now inquire into the evolution of the other element—that idea of an existence not our own, upon which all religious interpretations of the origin and meaning of the universe have been based.

The following extract from Spencer's *Ecclesiastical Institutions* (§ 659) will serve our purpose much better than any words of our own:—

Every voluntary act yields to the primitive man proof of a source of energy within him. Not that he thinks about his internal experiences; but in these experiences this notion lies latent. When producing motion in his limbs, and through them motion in other things, he is aware of the accompanying feeling of effort. And this sense of effort, which is the perceived antecedent of changes produced by him, becomes the conceived antecedent of changes not produced by him—furnishes him with a term of thought by which to represent the genesis of these objective changes. At first this idea of muscular forces as antecedent unusual events around him carries with it the whole assemblage of associated ideas. He thinks of the implied efforts as efforts exercised by beings like himself. In course of time these doubles of the dead, supposed to be workers of all but the most familiar changes, are modified in conception. Besides becoming less grossly material, some of them are developed into larger personalities presiding over classes of phenomena which, being comparatively regular in their order, suggest a belief in beings who, while far more powerful than men, are less variable in their modes of action.

<sup>\*</sup> *First Principles*, § 14.



So that the idea of force as exercised by such beings comes to be less associated with the idea of a human ghost. Further advances, by which minor supernatural agents are merged in one general agent, and by which the personality of this general agent is rendered vague while becoming widely extended, tend still further to dissociate the notion of objective force from the force known as such in consciousness; and the dissociation reaches its extreme in the thoughts of the man of science, who interprets in terms of force not only the visible changes of sensible bodies, but all physical changes whatever, even up to the undulations of the ethereal medium. Nevertheless, this force (be it force under that statical form by which matter resists, or under that dynamical form distinguished as energy) is to the last thought of in terms of that internal energy which he is conscious of as muscular effort. He is compelled to symbolise objective force in terms of subjective force from lack of any other symbol.

See, now, the implications. That internal energy which in the experiences of the primitive man was always the immediate antecedent of changes wrought by him; that energy which, when interpreting external changes, he thought of along with those attributes of a human personality connected with it in himself—is the same energy which, freed from anthropomorphic accompaniments, is now figured as the cause of all external phenomena. The last stage reached is recognition of the truth that force as it exists beyond consciousness cannot be like what we know as force within consciousness; and that yet, as either is capable of generating the other, they must be different modes of the same. Consequently, the final outcome of that speculation commenced by the primitive man is that the Power manifested throughout the universe distinguished as material, is the same Power which in ourselves wells up under the form of consciousness.

Little comment upon this passage is called for. The sense of a mode of life and power other than our own, which, as we have seen, has from the first been taken as the clue to the arcanum of the universe, necessarily arises under an anthropomorphic form, and under this form continues to persist

through all the less developed stages of thought. Meanwhile, the tendency to de-anthropomorphisation little by little modifies all the earlier religious conceptions by depriving them one by one of their human and *quasi*-human characteristics, beginning with the lower, but gradually passing onward to the higher; until finally, through continuance of the same tendency, all such characteristics will disappear. When this has at length taken place, there will be nothing left in thought but the permanent and inexpugnable sense of the power of which all the phenomenal universe is but the transient expression—the reality that underlies it all. Thus the conception of the life not ourselves—the life out of which all existence arises, and by which it is sustained—just as it has been enlarging from the very beginning, “must go on enlarging, until, by disappearance of its limits, it becomes a consciousness which transcends the forms of distinct thought, though it for ever remains a consciousness.”<sup>1</sup>

All this is surely a sufficient answer to those who maintain that Spencer's doctrine of the Absolute is merely a negation. On the contrary, for him it is the highest possible affirmation. Unknowable in itself, the noumenon—the reality behind phenomena—is still the foundation of all our knowledge. Whatever else may be doubted, this at least can never be called in question. It is the one inexpugnable element in consciousness, left over in the last analysis as the ultimate, inexplicable, indestructible first principle of thought. Obliterate it, and the whole fabric of our knowledge would crumble to nothing.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ecclesiastical Institutions*, § 658.

<sup>2</sup> *First Principles*, § 26.

## VI.

To recapitulate. Stating the matter broadly, and in the first place regarding only its negative aspects, we have seen that the Spencerian doctrine cuts the ground directly from beneath all forms of anthropomorphic theism, in which God appears as "Man's giant shadow, hailed divine."<sup>\*</sup> There are low and high forms of such theism, varying all along the line from that of the Fijian, who pictures his gods as cannibals as brutal and bloody as himself, to that of so refined and subtle a thinker as Dr. Martineau, who talks of the "character of God" and "the order of affections in Him"; but, be their differences otherwise what they may, they correspond in their ascription to the Absolute and Infinite Power of traits and characteristics having purely relative and finite connotations. But it is now clear that even the highest form of anthropomorphism is, philosophically considered, without justification. All our knowledge is limited to phenomena; and when, from dealing with phenomena, we pass on to think or speak of that which is not phenomenon, but reality, we are bound to think and speak in terms which necessarily lose all exact meaning in the transfer. Will, intention, foresight, personality, purpose—we know what these signify when applied to creatures conditioned like ourselves; applied to the Unconditioned, they are empty words, having no meaning at all, or meanings which involve countless absurdities and contradictions. "To think that God is, as we can think him to be, is blasphemy"—such is the conclusion to which we are ultimately forced. However vast, however deep,

our knowledge of the phenomenal universe may hereafter become, it is that phenomenal universe which must for ever oppose an adamant barrier to our thought. Science may press forward in every direction, and open up vistas of which at present we do not even dream; but her ever-widening circle will only bring us into larger touch with the nescience that lies beyond. The dividing line between appearance and reality can never be passed, no matter what achievements of insight and genius and knowledge the future ages may hold in store; and for all mankind, as for us, the eternal and ever-working power revealed to us only in its manifestations must still remain beyond definition, beyond even conception.

But happily our philosophy brings a message of promise as well as a message of discouragement. In his controversy with Mr. Frederic Harrison, some years ago, Spencer very properly called his brilliant antagonist to task for loudly applauding the irreparable defeat which theology had sustained at his (Spencer's) hands, while refusing to acknowledge the services he had rendered to religion by showing the essential germ of truth which, whatever its errors and divagations, every theology contains. The whole discussion only served to emphasise in many minds the feeling that it is not a little unfortunate that Spencer should have made such prominent use of the word "unknowable," not because his meaning is not perfectly plain to the careful student of Part I. of *First Principles*, but because he has thus left a loophole for what has been well described as some of the dreariest twaddle which has been given to the world under the name of philosophical discussion since the days of mediæval

<sup>\*</sup> William Watson, *The Unknown God*.

scholasticism. For the word "unknownable" has allowed the adverse critic to assume, and to build a whole superstructure of argument upon the assumption, that Spencer's doctrine of the Absolute is a vacuum—a mere negation of thought. So far from this being the case, we have shown that, for the Spencerian, the truth that behind all we know and can know, eluding thought and transcending imagination, there is the one Eternal Reality, is the corner-stone of all our knowledge—the one fact that can never be either analysed or got rid of. And here we may notice how, in this final datum of consciousness, religion and science find their complete and permanent reconciliation. For the supreme and everlasting power which religion calls God is the eternal and inscrutable energy which science finds at the back of its widest generalisations and beneath its deepest investigations. All science leads at last to the mystery with which all religion begins. Science, indeed, speaks of that mystery in language which is formal and colourless, for its statements are purely intellectual. But translated into the language of the emotions, its ideas become deeply religious.\*

It is true that all this means the inevitable sacrifice of many of the ideas now most deeply embedded in the current creeds. It is true that it compels us to look for a more and more complete purification from the conception of Deity of all human attributes; since to speak of the Divine will, or a Personal Creator, or an

intelligent Governor of the universe, is, from the standpoint of philosophical exactness, scarcely more admissible than to go back at once to the quaintly man-like images of the early Hebrew Scriptures. It is true that it forces us to realise with ever-increasing vividness how little all our feeble guessings must be worth in face of the Great Enigma, since, as the choice lies, not between personality and something lower, but between personality and something inconceivably higher, we are probably incalculably further from the truth when we speak of the Infinite and Absolute in terms of human emotion and human intelligence than we should be if we attempted to describe human emotion and human intelligence in terms of a plant's functions. But all this notwithstanding, and though we are forced to admit the futility of all the efforts of all the theologies to formulate that which is forever beyond formulation, we are not therefore to suppose that we are left without touch upon the Unseen and Eternal, or that there is no kinship and no communion between our spirits and the Source and Sustainer of all things—"the Power in darkness whom we guess." Given the ultimate Reality—the great central fact of consciousness—and we are bound to conceive of that Reality, not, indeed, as personal and conscious in the strict meaning of these words, but still as the power which is manifested in personality and consciousness in ourselves; personality and consciousness being modes in which the Eternal Energy expresses itself in us by reason of the fact that we are conditioned by that which is not ourselves. Thus, seeing our human necessity to give some form to our conceptions, and our human inability to find any form higher than

\* To prevent misapprehension, I may add that I do not myself rest in this somewhat blank form of reconciliation between science and religion. But I content myself here and in what follows with indicating merely what appear to me to be the immediate implications of Spencer's own thought.



the highest within ourselves, we may even allow ourselves to carry the ideas of personality and consciousness with us in our thought of the ultimate Reality, and I hold that we are justified in so doing, if we bear ever in mind the one supremely important qualification that our language does not *define*, but *symbolise*, and thus avoid the danger of passing from symbolism, which is defensible, to definition, which can lead to nothing but the confusion of empty dogmatism, and the ignorance which mistakes itself for knowledge.\*

Does this seem, after all, to be offering little in place of that which is taken away? To the present generation this must needs perhaps be so. Men move with difficulty from concrete image to abstract statement. The religious progress of the world has been like the slow ascent of a man up a sheer perpendicular cliff—every new foothold upward has been carved out and graven deep with infinite labour and countless tears. The thought a little in advance of the emotional grasp of each era has to that era necessarily seemed chilling and repulsive—it has lacked the warmth, the glow, the appealing power, which are possessed only by ideas long steeped in the

feelings. No wonder, then, that when his anthropomorphic error had been proved to him, the old monk Serapion should have cried aloud in all the agony of his despair, "You have robbed me of my God!" No wonder that in the hour of unspeakable craving Luther's wife should have exclaimed against the coldness and hardness of her new creed. This must necessarily be the cry of many in every period of transition from lower to higher thought in the future, as it has already been the cry of many during every such crisis in the past. Every movement forward out of familiar forms and feelings has inevitably been attended by some wrenching of the religious nature; and not without still further agitation and upheaval shall we pass at length out of anthropomorphic theism altogether into that cosmic theism to which the long course of religious evolution has from the very first been slowly leading us. In the development of thought, as Professor Clifford pointed out, the feelings can never quite keep pace with the intellect—a truth which throws a flood of light upon the religious crisis of our own day. When the existing balance between knowledge and emotion is disturbed by the discovery of fresh truth, the intellect will readily adjust itself to the new conditions, while the emotions cling tenaciously about the things that are being left behind. Thus, while intellectually we may seize and appropriate those vast cosmical ideas which the wider knowledge of our time is yielding us in place of the simpler and cruder imaginings of the past; while we may even realise more or less clearly that these new ideas are in themselves infinitely more impressive, more awe-inspiring, more truly religious, than any that have been possible to mankind hitherto; yet until these

\* For myself I go with Fiske when he says: "I do not hold.....that we are justified in using such an expression as 'infinite personality' in a philosophical inquiry, where clearness of thought and speech is above all things desirable. But I do hold most emphatically that we are not debarred from ascribing a *quasi*-psychical nature to the Deity simply because we can frame no proper conception of such a nature as absolute and infinite." It must be remembered (though it is too often forgotten) that, unless we cease to think altogether, we *must* think anthropomorphically; and, as Dr. Martineau rightly protested, materialism as a theory of things is quite as anthropomorphic as the current theism.

ideas can grow sacred to us through habit and association, until they can sink down into our feelings and dwell there, and become saturated with the finer atmosphere of our thought, they will be little to us but the abstractions of philosophy. That the mass of men will progress far in the difficult task of thus incorporating them and making them their own, in our time, or for many generations to come, can hardly be supposed. But that adjustment of emotion to knowledge, which is a constant accompaniment of evolving life, will in time vitalise and spiritualise these new and now strange concepts of our philosophy—perhaps more rapidly than some of us are apt to imagine.

“The common problem—yours, mine, every-one’s,

Is—not to fancy what were fair in life  
Provided it could be—but finding first  
What may be, then find how to make it fair  
Up to our means—a very different thing.”

And the religious problem of the race at large is similar to this. The emotions of each generation, adjusted to the average knowledge of that generation, cannot but receive a rude shock when some new scientific revelation sweeps away their old foundations, and thus shatters the ancient bases of religious faith. At such a crisis what is to be done? Nothing, but to accept the new truth in all humility, and, in the firm trust that the further evolution of thought will presently lead to the complete reharmonisation of knowledge and feeling, to set our faces resolutely towards the light. The true religious teacher in such a transitional period is, therefore, not the man who enters the battlefield of thought to fight for the knowledge of yesterday against the knowledge of to-day; but rather he who,

gifted with prophetic vision, is the first to enter sympathetically into all that science reveals concerning the order of the universe, and to proclaim its religious bearings to a world that, for the time being, it has blinded “by excess of light.” Would that our preachers and theologians could only thus realise their privileges and their responsibilities, and from the history of the many epochs of dire struggle and confusion through which, amid darkness and despair, men have in the past been carried forward, as on a tidal wave, to higher levels of thought and feeling, could but catch the inspiration of a larger faith in what the future holds in store! Meanwhile, it is to the great poets particularly that we have to look for help. In the following magnificent lines of Wordsworth, for example, we may perhaps read the promise of a near and complete translation of the religious ideas which we have been here trying to interpret—the ideas of an Eternal Power manifesting itself through the order of Nature, and of the essential unity of all life—out of the language of science into the language of the feelings—the natural language, be it ever remembered, for all religious faith and aspiration:—

“I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:  
A motion and a spirit that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Lines Composed a few Miles above Tintern Abbey*, 1798. This superb passage, together with such poems as Tennyson’s *Ancient Sage* and *Akbar’s Dream*, may be profitably compared with those passages in *The Task* in which Cowper gave expression to the mechanical

Of one thing at least we may rest assured. As each larger thought of the universe has at length been absorbed into the emotions, and as from the vantage-point then reached men have looked back and seen their older conceptions in all their limitations and crudity ; so will this largest thought yet brought upon our horizon be also emotionally appropriated ; and so, also, when this has been done, will men realise how imperfect were all the ideas belonging even to the highest stage of anthropomorphism. Then, indeed, will the religious emotions, harmonising with a wider, truer, and deeper knowledge of the Cosmos, and a fuller and profounder sense of the Reality of which the universe is but the fleeting manifestation, as much transcend the religious emotions of our own day as do these the

theism of Paley and his school. Such a comparison enables us to appreciate the real advance that we have made towards an emotionalisation of the new thoughts of science concerning the universe and the final mystery of life.

religious emotions of the fetich-worshipping savage. Nor can the future progress of science do otherwise than strengthen and enlarge them. As knowledge grows "from more to more," so will "more of reverence in us dwell," and the choral harmonies of knowledge and feeling in the time to come will be richer and vaster than the broken music of the past. For with every fresh exploration through a universe which is literally pulsating with life—a universe "boundless inward in the atom, boundless outward through the whole"—one truth will rise into ever greater distinctness, and fill a larger and larger place in the minds of men. For amid all the "mysteries which become the more mysterious the more they are thought about, there will remain the absolute certainty" that we are "ever in presence of an Infinite and Eternal Energy, from which all things proceed." Here Science finds with Religion the ultimate and everlasting Fact of facts.



